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THE CLUB

AND

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

BEING

PICTURES OF MODERN LIFE:

SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND PROFESSIONAL.

By CECIL HAY, M.A.

98236

Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille,
Sich ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt.—GŒTHE: *Tasso.*

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THAT the coffee-house stood to a past age precisely in the same relation that the club-house does to the present, and that the former was the natural and lineal progenitor of the latter, are facts which have been explained and demonstrated elsewhere at sufficient length. How the metamorphosis of the one into the other—how the transition of the life of the tavern to that of the club occurred—

what was the genesis and development of those societies which make Pall Mall celebrated, and add their architectural glories to the street of St. James's, are circumstances which have, too, received a sufficient amount of elucidation. Nor have we passed by in the immediately preceding chapters unnoticed, the fact that the attempts which are now-a-days made to reproduce the social existence in taverns, which was the distinguishing trait of, at least, one portion of the last century, is theoretically an anachronism and is practically a failure. Nevertheless, coffee-house life at the present day is just as much a reality as it ever was. There are still now, just as there always were, whole classes of men dependent not merely for the luxuries and comforts of existence, but also for their necessities, upon the opportunities which taverns afford. Undoubtedly the club is an immensely powerful factor in our modern life. Unquestionably it has in great measure supplanted the tavern, and robbed the coffee-house of a large portion of its occupation. Still there is a large body of men whom it does not reach or affect in any way, and to whom its advantages, privileges, and blessings are but so many dead letters. The field of the coffee-house life of London in the present day is an extensive one, and well worth the measure of investigation and attention which we shall devote to it in this chapter.

How are we to enumerate and describe the classes from which the coffee-house frequenters of London are drawn? Who are the men that, whether from choice

or compulsion, have refused to be won over by the attractions of club life, and stick contentedly to the order of things that prevailed and was popular when the wits of the Elizabethan age used to toss each other for tankards of ale at the Mermaid and elsewhere? It would be easy to point out among the systematic or occasional tavern haunters of London, members of most of the various social orders that we have,—easy to show, as we presently shall show, that it is not merely to the ranks of Bohemianism and Vaurienism that the coffee-houses of the metropolis are indebted for their contingents of customers. There are many who are disposed to believe in the truth of the old saying, and to think that after all the warmest welcome which they have ever found is in an inn. There are many, too, who with a club, perhaps clubs of their own, still occasionally turn into those little *deversoria* in which certain streets that lead out of the Haymarket, and the thoroughfares known as Fleet Street and the Strand, so plentifully abound, simply because they meet club-less friends there at state hours. Then there is a very numerous class of steady-going men of business, the daily doings of whose lives proceed with the regularity of clock-work, who are "certain finds" at some coffee-house or other at the period of lunch or dinner, should they be bachelors, as the case may be. Nor a scarcely less numerous class is that which spends the whole of its life in flitting from one tavern to another, which makes it one of the main businesses of existence to lunch here and to dine there—a class this

which might furnish many a melancholy instance of what we have before alluded to in the forcible phraseology of Mr. Dickens, as "Dry Rot"—a class which would afford many an illustration of pitiable decadence, of moral annihilation, of promises unfulfilled, and of whole careers destroyed. Add to these various types of coffee-house customers—who may be considered in the light of the regular standing dishes of the places which are their respective houses of call—a whole host of others more or less punctual in their attendance: the man of many occupations, who has been detained in town on pressing business, and who, sooner than discompose his household when he returns home, takes a hurried chop, as best he can; the not insignificant number of young men engaged in offices during the day, with no home at all, in the midst of the great Sahara of London life, who eat their dinner at coffee-house or restaurant, before retiring to the solitary gloom of their lodgings, or plunging into the vortex of the intensely dull and intolerably vulgar dissipation of second-rate London life; the representatives of the invading army of country cousins, who visit us at fixed periods of the year, and who have an idea that the metropolis has not been properly done, unless their dinner has been eaten once or twice full in the view of a miscellaneously selected public—take all these human ingredients, mix them carefully, and a very respectable idea will have been formed of the various species recognizable amongst the multitudinous tavern haunters of London.

We must be allowed in this chapter to attach a considerable latitude of significance to the sense in which the word coffee-house is used, and to take it as indicating anything from the gorgeously-furnished and sumptuously-provided restaurant, such as that of Mr. Blanchard, in Regent Street, or of the proprietor of the Pall Mall—not the journal, but the mansion which confronts you as you make your way from Waterloo Place into Trafalgar Square—down to the dingy and obscure establishments which abound in the purlieus of Soho, or are to be seen in mysterious alleys east of Temple Bar, with reference to which your initiated friend confidentially assures you that if you wish to get the best chop or steak in London, yonder lies your opportunity. We rather regretfully notice the decline of fish dinners as an institution in the town. Not long since these piscatorial ordinaries existed in several places in the Strand and its continuation thoroughfare. As we pass by the houses rendered sacred to our memories by many an association of a most satisfactory repast upon almost every conceivable species of finny creature for which the depths of the sea could be ransacked, terminated by most unexceptionable punch, and accompanied by more than tolerable talk, we find the sign of Ichabod metaphorically written on their *façade*. Their glory is departed; they are accommodated to other purposes; and the site of what was a fish ordinary is, alas! nothing more than a gin-palace now. In Billingsgate only does the institution as a recognized thing continue to exist; and unfortunately many

persons who found it perfectly compatible with their arrangements to feast on turbot and salmon in the Strand would find the great fish mart of London inconveniently in the direction of the rising sun. "Yon sun that sets upon the sea, we follow in his flight." We will invert in practice the moral of the quotation, and commence our exploration of the coffee-houses of London at the eastward, and not the westward end.

The day of the City taverns and coffee-houses of London is rapidly on the decline. Interrogate the waiter as to the prosperity of the house, and he will inform you that the business is nothing like what it used to be. Ask the disconsolate proprietor, and he will shake his head. There may still be a rush of clerks for the midday meal,—call it lunch or dinner; but there is a signally fatal falling off in the number of well-to-do representatives of commerce, who used to feast frequently and well on the best dishes which the establishment could supply, to say nothing of one or even two bottles of that tawny old port, for which mine host had achieved a reputation. How is this? The deficiency must at once be referred to the spreading influences of club life, and also to that gradual abolition of the social barriers once hardly and clearly fixed between different classes of the community; the very decided manner into which the various social orders have thus been drawn into closer communion with each other; the consequent enlargement of acquaintanceship, with the increased amount of dinner invitations which it engenders,

and which leave your modern son of commerce no time to dine in solitary state at one of those old-established and admirably-managed City coffee-houses. Here and there a *laudator temporis acti* may be discovered who refuses to be moved by the current, and sticks to his social moorings of the past. Neither the coffee-room of the club nor the invitation to the private dinner-party will tempt old Fixity, one of the partners in the well-known firm of Fixity, Tenure, and Co., from his snug table at the Prelacy Tavern. There he dines every day immediately after office hours, say between four and five. Wife or family he appears to have none, nor indeed relations of any kind. The place is familiar to him as his own counting-house, and you might as easily succeed in inducing him to desert the Prelacy as to forsake the office in Dead Man's Court, for the space of forty-eight hours continuously. He is emphatically the oldest inhabitant of the tavern. Considerably senior to the present landlord, and the present landlord has been here now more than a quarter of a century; senior even to the head-waiter, farther back than whose advent no mortal memory can date; as much a part of the establishment as the well-polished, rich-looking mahogany table, the old clock on the wainscoted wall above the mantel-piece, the series of coloured prints commemorative of the glories of the coaching days, and the genuine oil-painted original of the mails starting from the General Post Office at St. Martin's-le-Grand, at five o'clock on a murky November

day. The proprietor greets Mr. Fixity soon as ever he makes his appearance with a reverent bow, as if he were actually in the presence of the *genius loci*; the waiters do the same; and even the thoughtless, giddy young gentlemen who occasionally come into the parlour of the Prelacy, office hours over, to crack a bottle of the old brown sherry for which it is famous, take uncommonly good care to preserve a decorous mien and a well-controlled tongue before Mr. Fixity.

As we have said, it is the luncheon hour and not the dinner hour which is the busiest at the City coffee-house. If you want to study the physiognomy of City men, that is the period which you should select. Lounge into one of the recognized places for the consumption of the early afternoon meal, and you will find no lack of metropolitan types. There is the staid, steady, middle-aged man of business, solemnly sipping his soup, or munching his sandwich, clad in sombre attire, with whiskers cut after the approved mutton-chop pattern, a look of metallic inflexibility about his eyes, the corner of his mouth strained, and his forehead puckered. You might as soon try to overreach that gentleman yonder as to get the better in any bargain, where sharpness will carry the day, of the proverbial American Jew of Scotch extraction. Then you have, close beside, a knot of the younger and more jaunty representatives of the sons of commerce—men of ages varying from thirty to forty. Conspicuous some of them by whiskers and beard of the Dundreary description—very knowing

gentlemen, indeed, in their own estimation these, and of an extremely speculative turn of mind. As for novelties in the way of Companies, they have always something of the kind in view; nor do they confine their spirit of commercial enterprise to the field of business pure and proper alone. If they are regular in their attendance upon the Stock Exchange, they are not less regular in their attendance at the great race meetings of the year, and the income which accrues to them from distinctly professional sources is, so report says, eked out and aggrandized in a very convenient and comfortable manner by these somewhat extra-professional means. These gentlemen are, in fact, representatives of the new generation of the sons of commerce, just as those, a specimen of whom we looked at immediately before, were of the old steady-going Conservative stock. The crowd is a motley one, made up of clerks of every order and degree, from the middle-aged man, in whose every feature you can see plainly delineated traces of the care, anxiety, and gnawing thoughtfulness which an invalid wife, a numerous family, and a salary of eighty pounds a-year involve, down to the dashing youngster, articled to some City solicitor, gorgeously arrayed in frock-coat of spick and span newness, resplendent with variegated nosegay blooming in his button-hole, who lives in Bayswater, goes eastward in the morning on one of Mr. Hughes' fast omnibuses, and returns to dine in the bosom of his family at seven.

Directly we enter Fleet Street we are on the chosen

ground of tavern tradition—the veritable haunted soil of coffee-house life. Whichever way we turn, whatever place of refreshment we enter, we are straightway confronted, in imagination at least, with a host of venerable phantoms, rising from the limbo of the past. If we step into Peele's for a modest snack, we expect the walls of that establishment confidentially to whisper in our ears tales of the good things said and done by the wits who used once upon a time to congregate within its precincts. If we venture into the Mitre, there to lunch, as we substantially may, it is only natural for us, at every upward glance that we give from our plate, to fancy we can recognize the burly form of the great lexicographer looming in through the entrance door, and the obsequious attitude of the attentive Boswell; if a sound disturbs our musings, it is but to thrill us with the conviction that we shall presently hear the gruff, stentorian voice enunciate, in its own unmistakable accents, some ponderous aphorism, or jocose dogmatism, commencing with the inevitable "Sir!" If we repair to Dick's, the same spectres of a vanished period will bear us company; or if we decide upon the Cock, to say nothing of the antique comrades who we may expect to seat themselves at our table, do we not imagine t hat we have an excellent chance of witnessing Mr. Tennyson meditating, over the succulent steak and the port "of Lusitanian summers," another monologue of Will Waterproof? What a pity that instead of realizing any of these delightful experiences, we shall in all

probability only come across a sprinkling of humdrum nineteenth-century characters, and that instead of gathering a harvest of conversational pearls, we shall simply listen to the technical slang of prosaic barristers, the gossip of petty tradesmen, and the miserably small talk of tenth-rate literati!

Still, uninteresting as are the companions whom we shall meet in these haunts, in comparison with those who should be our associates, could we re-people Dick's, or Peele's, or the Cock, at will, there are yet certain phases of life and society exhibited in these establishments which it is worth while for the student of human nature passingly to observe. A great place, in its way, for lunch is the Cheshire Cheese; celebrated are its chops, and admirable its ale. And in the composition of the customers who resort thither for that constitutional meal there is observable a very considerable degree of constancy. There is no small proportion which resorts thither regularly as midday comes round. The establishment is to them quite as much of a club as if it was situated in St. James's Street, and had all the appliances and luxuries with which the joint-stock palaces in that locality are furnished. At the Cheshire Cheese they can get as much food for the body as they require, in the shape of honestly homely viands, and of food for the mind in the shape of the miscellaneous newspapers scattered upon the tables and the seats; or do they prefer an apartment free from the continual clatter of knives and forks, and pervaded in a less signal

degree by the odour of steaks hissing from the gridiron, and kidneys steaming hot? There is the smoking-room up-stairs, and agreeable beverages are easily to be had upon demand. Is it wonderful, then, that to no small number of the *habitués* of the deversorium in question the establishment veritably constitutes a club—a club which is practically of far greater use to them than it would be were its situation one or two miles farther westward, simply because there it is on the spot, in the very centre and thick of all their daily avocations and engagements. As we have said, you may be sure whenever you enter the Cheshire Cheese to find more than one set of visitors, to whom the tavern is precisely what we have described. Leaving out of consideration the clerkly and commercial element, for whom it constitutes a regular place of midday call, there is no insignificant proportion of gentlemen whose occupations are more or less literary, for whom it is everything that the Garrick could be, and a good deal more. The average English journalist is a being of curious habits. Any time from twelve till four he is to be met with in great abundance in Fleet Street. Buff, who writes for the 'Banner,' meets Chuff, who writes for the 'Ensign'—by-the-by, they declaim against each other, politically speaking, with the utmost vigour in the columns of their respective papers, whenever an opportunity occurs, but socially they are, notwithstanding, sworn allies and devoted boon companions—Buff suggests that the morning is hot, and that sherry and seltzer, with

a lump of ice in it, would be a grateful and refreshing tipple; or Chuff insinuates that it is a raw and nipping air, and that brown sherry is the one thing calculated to keep out the cold. 'No matter what the condition of the atmosphere may be, if Chuff meets Buff the pair will discover that it imperatively requires some fortification of the inner man against its injurious influences with some liquid specific, and the natural thing is an adjournment to the immediately contiguous hostelry, which we will suppose to be the Cheshire Cheese. A most remarkable coincidence, or, in the words of Mr. Montagu Tigg, "the greatest meeting of modern or ancient times," ensues directly the two friends have entered the tavern. Whom should they find at the bar partaking of some ingenious compound, whose nature it would be impertinent too critically to examine, but Mr. Duff, of the 'Planet.' That Mr. Duff should drink something with Mr. Chuff and Mr. Buff, that Mr. C. and Mr. B. should return the delicate attention by drinking something with Mr. D., is simply inevitable. Time wears away, and Mr. Buff observes that he is a victim to the pangs of hunger, and that the day is now ripe for lunch. No sooner have the trio taken their seats, than who should stroll in but Mr. Huff and Mr. Muff, bent on an exactly identical errand, and clamorous for "chops and kidneys to follow." These are soon dispatched, and the whole body of five mount upwards to the smoking-room. Here they are joined by none other than Puff, who has been occupied throughout

the morning with one of his usual bootless expeditions into the City, where he was to see two or three capitalists, who have all but promised him to start what has been the cherished idol of the fancy of the ingenious Puff any time during the last five years—a farthing paper. Puff is about the most sanguine creature in existence. Ordinary beings would have been discouraged by the repeated false starts which he has made, and by the grossly heartless manner in which the capitalists, whom Puff is always seeing, have thrown him overboard. But Puff holds up against all disappointments, seriously believes in the realization of his dreams, absolutely anticipates the epoch at which the farthing journal will become an accomplished fact, and in sober earnestness assures his five friends, in the smoking-room of the Cheshire Cheese, that before many weeks are over he will be able to put something in their way really worth having—"A precious sight better," says the enthusiastic Puff, "than all your 'Banners,' 'Ensigns,' and 'Planets.' Trust me, my boy," continues the active little gentleman, "I know a thing or two. Chuff, you shall be foreign editor; Duff shall be Paris correspondent; and as for Buff and Muff, their fortunes are as good as made. Don't think 'twill pay?" indignantly inquires our friend, in answer to some ill-suppressed signs of scepticism on the part of one or two members of the company present. "I'll tell you what it is—I have gone over all the calculations again and again; here they are," —and Puff produces a ponderous pile of papers from his

breast-pocket,—" and reduced the whole thing to a mathematical certainty. My dear boy, in six months' time the 'Flash in the Pan'—deuced good name that—will infallibly be a property of sixty thousand pounds a-year. I really believe I have a genius for these concerns," concludes Puff, and the whole company assembled, unanimously order one more gin-sling to drink success to 'Flash in the Pan,' Puff's farthing paper, which is as good as started already.

Mr. Gilbert may talk as he likes of the Patent mania: 'tis as nothing compared to the newspaper mania, which every year can boast of an increased number of credulous victims.

Not less true is it of such a coffee-house as Dick's than of that which we have just quitted, that for a numerous proportion of those who visit it, it is all that a club could be. Dick's, however, may be described as being at the present day infinitely more of a class and professional haunt than other analogous establishments. What the Oxford and Cambridge is to the clubs, that Dick's is to the coffee-houses of London. In both the legal element is equally predominant. The great standing dishes of each are barristers. Detestable as forensic shop is, the place is still worth looking at, not merely for the sake of noticing the salient idiosyncrasies of its life because they are idiosyncrasies, but because they are in themselves amusing as well. And the chatter of the bar is happily relieved by the free introduction of numerous other

topics, literary, social, and political, from Chinese metaphysics down to the condition of the London street. There is more than one little fraternity in the habit of holding periodical and regularly fixed reunions within the precincts of this establishment—bands of men, tied together by similarity of tastes and pursuits, an identity of associations, or a community of interests. University scholars for the most part these, most of them called to the bar. Some practising, and doing nothing else; others, and the major portion, filling up the spacious intervals between precarious briefs, with authorship or journalism. Pleasant enough these meetings are; the men are gentlemen, and genially disposed too. Say that the hour is six: well, if you enter Dick's you will see grouped round a table a party of some half-dozen, selected in the way and on the principles that we have specified. For the most part they are old college friends, glad to see each other and discuss the favourite themes after the day's work is done. That gentleman who is holding forth on Conservative politics, in a way which if it is somewhat dogmatical, still shows that he is master of his subject, is Mr. Thomas Kettilby, a very regular *habitué* of Dick's—something of a barrister, but a good deal more of a journalist. The conversation takes a turn. The Game-laws and the Church-rate question are allowed to drop, and the classics come to the fore. Mr. Helleen has a new theory about the religion of the Greek dramatists, or a novel idea as to the real purpose of the

Æneid. This gentleman, it is said among his friends, might have done anything at the University; might have got as many first-classes as he chose, and all the public scholarships which were ever heard of, and have been welcomed as a Fellow in any society he desired to enter, with open arms. But Mr. Helleen missed his opportunity, and there he is—doubtless an excellent classic—in the opinion of his friends—but without any academical insignia—for Mr. Helleen, as is often the case with these *lusus naturæ*, merely passed for his degree—to denote to the world that he is such. Then there is Mr. Peregree, on his left, probably the cleverest man of the company—certainly the most travelled, for Mr. Peregree spends half of every year on an average with a knapsack on his back, searching for new beauties in every out-of-the-way corner in Europe. 'Tis a genial meeting; and it is meetings of this description that have invested the tavern at which we are taking our modest and solitary chop with the exceptional character which it enjoys. The remainder of the diners in other parts of the room are perfectly aware of the fact, and glance occasionally with looks of respectful approval to the friendly company in the corner yonder.

There is an amusing story told, which we believe to be founded on fact—at any rate *si non è vero è ben trovato*—of a certain gentleman who, being entrusted with a commission to start at once as special correspondent to Lithuania, or some other such region of the habitable world, and also with a liberal sum of money to defray the

expenses of his trip thither, on leaving his newspaper office, somewhere in, or in the neighbourhood of, Fleet Street, failed to get any farther on his outward-bound journey than Temple Bar, was waylaid by friends on the eastern side of that archaic structure, spent his time and his money in their society, and, when the proprietors of the journal which he represented fondly fancied that he was well *en route* to his destination, presented himself exactly three days after the date of his supposed departure in the editor's room, explaining, with modifications and variations it is to be presumed, the causes of his detention, and gently hinting at the necessity of another subsidy. Now we regard it as matter of serious apprehension lest we ourselves should succumb to a similar destiny, and lest we should never find ourselves well clear of the Strand, if we hang about that enchanted quarter any longer. We will therefore, by way of precaution, abruptly tear ourselves away from the spot, and, following the footsteps of Empire, wend our way westward also.

We are in what is *par excellence* the land of coffee-houses and taverns in the occidental portion of London, within something less than a moderate stone-throw of the Haymarket, and in a certain street which runs out of it at right angles. As for the particular tavern which we are about to enter, we will say no more touching its or rather its proprietor's name, than that the house in question is known to some of its *habitués* by the Gallicism,

which is scarcely a disguise, of Delepierre; and that with reference to the patronymic of the owner, certain visitors of a classical turn of mind, but martyrs to a painful condition of chronic impecuniosity, alluding to the natural objection which the gentleman in question entertains to letting small scores mount up to an indefinite height, are in the habit of humorously quoting the line *Gutta cavat lapidem non vi sed sæpe cadendo.* Of one thing let the reader who confides in us as a trustworthy cicerone be quite sure—the tavern is a thoroughly excellent one. The fluids and the solids supplied are utterly unimpeachable in all respects: the waiters are scrupulously attentive, and Mr. Delepierre—well there is no material objection to the Gallicism—is as favourable a specimen of mine host as could be desired or met with. Mr. Delepierre's establishment approximates perhaps more closely than does any other coffee-house in London to the club. Hitherto we have only seen isolated instances of the club spirit in tavern life. They have not affected the general atmosphere of the place. Here, however, a marked change is discernible. The *genius loci* is essentially that of the club. We have something more than the occasional gathering of sets of friends—strangers to all else but themselves. At Mr. Delepierre's there is a certain universality of fellowship. *Imperia in imperiis*, wheels within wheels there may doubtless be; but there is a general conviction on the part of all the *habitués* of the establishment that the mere fact of repairing, whether they

do for their lunch or for an ante-prandial sherry, constitutes a genuine link of communion, and that there should exist a species of freemasonry between all the frequenters of Mr. Delepierre's house of call. And as a matter of fact, in a great measure there does. Strangers of course occasionally lounge in, uninitiated into the mysteries of the place, and wholly ignorant of the existence of the charmed circle. But then the little tavern in Panton Street is public, like the rest of its kind. So invariable is this conviction which we have mentioned on the part of those who resort thither, that it is no unusual thing if you stroll in about mid-day to hear some gentleman, with a retrospective allusion to the hesternal compotation, couching his inquiries after the health of his friends in terms which imply a deeply-rooted belief in the mystic union existing between himself and his comrades, in their close and indissoluble cohesion, and in the necessity of a species of sympathetic movement of one member of the body with every other member: "How are we to-day? it strikes me we were rather far gone yesterday?" As for yourself, you were in all probability miles removed from the premises at the time referred to; it would be an insult to you to suppose that you had ever exceeded in your cups, and you wonder what the gentleman who makes the tender inquiry is driving at. But the phraseology in question is one of the peculiar eccentricities of the place.

We will pioneer you into the intricacies of the esta-

blishment, and assist you, if you please, to shake off, as much as possible, that sense of strangeness incidental to your first entrance, and, as Lord Bacon tells us, inseparable from all perfect beauty. Suppose the hour to be five P.M. Mr. Delepierre's is not in any special sense a dining house. Luncheon, and the sherry-and-bitters period of the day—these are the two seasons in which, if you would see it in the full tide of its existence, it should be visited. The selection that we have on the present occasion of Mr. Delepierre's *habitués* is fortunately typical. Look at that table yonder, and you will see some gentlemen not wholly unknown to fame, who will supply you for a few minutes with decidedly amusing studies. As we have said, it is now close upon five, and these gentlemen have been lunching since two.

"What say you to a bowl of punch?" remarks one of the company—a portly personage with a rubicund face. The vote is carried *nem. con.* The proposer manufactures the beverage, and we promise you that the flavour of the whisky, for whisky punch it is, is not drowned in the admixture of water.

An entertaining gentleman apparently this, who is devoted to strong drinks before dinner, judging at least from the laughter inextinguishable which hails his anecdotes and greets his comments. There is no doubt about it, Mr. Fluid Plethora—that is his name—is a vastly entertaining companion, and not a little clever, to boot. Rhetoric and classics—these Mr. Fluid Plethora considers his strong

points. He is an Oxford man, and, though he has now past more than a quarter of a century since he took his degree, on the brink of doing something, he has yet achieved nothing. He has long since settled that his true and only proper destination is St. Stephen's, and at this present moment he is entertaining his friends with a strikingly humorous, and a somewhat fanciful account of the invitation which he has received from the heads of the great Liberal party to go down and contest the vacant seat at Fuddleton.

"By George, sir, they have offered me three thousand pounds for my expenses, and have promised me an under-secretaryship in the Treasury directly I take my seat. By George, sir,"—St. George, it may be observed, is the favourite divinity, that is next to Bacchus, in Mr. Plethora Fluid's pantheon—"but it shall be done."

Whereat Plethora Fluid's friends laugh, and remark *sotto voce* to each other that he is in capital force to-day.

Next to Mr. Fluid is seated the well-known poet, novelist, essayist, journalist—what you will—Mr. Plantagenet Lesbius, a really most brilliant man, and beyond a doubt the writer of the most sparkling *chansons* of the day. From the manner in which Plantagenet moves uneasily in his seat, sprawls out his enormous legs—Plantagenet is a *vir montis instar*—to the full tether of their length, and otherwise evinces symptoms of a general mental uneasiness, you rightly infer the fact that this gentleman does not entirely approve of Mr. Plethora

Fluid keeping the whole of the conversational game entirely to himself. The wished-for opportunity soon presents itself. Mr. Fluid, in the course of his extremely verbose rhetoric, introduces a classical quotation; it happens to be from Catullus, Plantagenet's favourite author; it also happened to be incorrect, and Plantagenet, to adopt the vernacular, is immediately down on Plethora like a knife. Perhaps in the dispute which ensues you are reminded somewhat forcibly of a controversy described in a certain satire of Horace, narrating the incidents of his journey to Brundusium, between two celebrities who were scarcely sages. Well, even if you are, what of it? You have had your laugh; is not that enough?

As for the remainder of the company, there are one or two *littérateurs*, who have a penchant and a capacity for saying neat things, and who interpolate them when and as they can in the vociferous talk of Plantagenet and Plethora. There is an artist, who always gives himself a holiday in the afternoon of Saturday—the last day of the week is that which we have selected for our visit: and lastly there is the gentleman, a by no means obscure political character, now playing the part of entertainer, whose whim it suits occasionally to beguile a few passing hours in this miscellaneous manner. Mr. Fairborn, M.P., —that is this gentleman's name—likes to be amused, and if Plethora and Plantagenet, and others of that kidney, choose to tumble for his pleasure, who is to say them nay?

And very amusing in its way the whole affair—"caper" is the particular expression which our friend Plethora employs to denote the meeting—is: an entertainment, perhaps, not of the highest order in any sense; but then, as Plantagenet justly observes, "we men of brains must occasionally let ourselves down to the level of ordinary humanity."

Having given this little picture of the doings of so *recherché* a selection of the *habitués* of Mr. Delepierre's, it would, perhaps, be a pity to spoil its effect by attempting any portraits of the remainder of the company. We will say nothing here of the mysterious mortals who are pointed out to you, and of whom Plethora Fluid is a not unfair type, as men who might have achieved any measure of distinction that they had wished, had they only wished it at all; of the nameless crowd who make their visits to Mr. Delepierre's the main business of their lives—of the outsiders who occasionally step in in the shape principally of disreputable "captains," who have found it convenient to sell out of their regiment, and who have been requested to remove their names from the lists of the Rag; and of the whole host of quidnuncs, literary, artistic, social, and political, who are ready to discuss and settle the merits of any author, living or dead—to decide upon any disputed point of art—to give you any amount of scandal—and to dictate to the Premier, at a moment's notice, the correct line of policy which he should adopt on any *vexata quæstio* which may

happen to be troubling him. There are plenty of these omniscient gentlemen to be met with in Mr. Delepierre's establishment, to whom the tobacco smoke, amid which they expound their sentiments, is the only congenial atmosphere in the world, and who would regard existence without the little coffee-room in Panton Street as an utter blank of intolerable desolation.

The coffee-house life of London: the theme is fertile to infinity. Coffee-houses, like clubs, are of different kinds, and like clubs, have each of them their specially favourable seasons for investigation and observation. There are pre-eminently dining-clubs and supper-clubs, and their corresponding varieties of coffee-houses. The glimpses, however, which we have already given into their internal economy, must be considered sufficient. We need not dwell upon the suppers at the Albion—snug little meals these—celebrated by knots of friendly *littérateurs*, to whom the tavern in question is far more than any club could ever be, or as we should be justified in doing upon the amicable meetings which take place in Mr. Green's famous and admirable establishment beneath the Covent Garden Piazza. All that we desired to do was to show that there is a tavern life in the present day, even as there is a club life—to point out what are the affinities between the two—what the points of similarity and what those of disagreement. Nor, it may reasonably be said, so long as human nature continues to have the same erratic instinct which, in spite of all that is done in the

way of repression, will occasionally, in the most cultivated age, crop up and mutiny against the established usages of propriety, will tavern life become an obsolete phenomenon, and will there cease to be a multitude of men to whom the club can never minister everything for which they crave.

As for the influence of tavern existence upon the character of its votaries, that is altogether another question. Socially speaking, it certainly does not soften the manners and prevent their being brutal. The man who is in the habit of passing his life in one round of tavern visits, will not easily shake off, when he is out of tavern society, the customs and ways with which his ordinary existence inoculates him, and you may always expect from such an one, should the question be asked him at dinner, whether he will be helped to one dish or another, such a reply as we ourselves once heard from an incorrigible tavern *habitué*, that he "will take some *vol-au-vent* now, and a cutlet *to follow*."

PART II.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

CHAPTER I.

THE DRAWING-ROOM IN ITS RELATION TO THE CLUB.

Why the Drawing-room should be treated of in connection with the Club — Its place in masculine education — Its existence dispenses for Women with the necessity of a Club — Matrimony and the Drawing-room — The Drawing-room should be a contrast to, as well as an extension of, the Club.

At the outset of this work we ventured to urge as a reason for embracing the social philosophy of the drawing-room in the same volume as that of the club, the undeniable truth that our modern life is a species of dualism, the factors of which are the two institutions in question. If at the time we represented the one power as antagonistic to the other, we acted, as we then hinted, rather out of deference to what may be supposed to be the preconceived opinions of our readers than with any regard to what is in reality the case, or to what our own honest convictions assuredly are. To win an opponent over to your own cause it is desirable to follow the old apostolic exemplar, and to become all things to all men. If you go with your adversary one mile, you may in turn compel him to go with you twain. We trust that by a judicious

appeal to the principles contained in our opening chapters we shall have by this time plainly proved to the satisfaction of mothers, sisters, and wives, that the feud, which there is a vulgar notion exists between the drawing-room and the club, is not a whit less the result of a distorted and mistaken view of the question, than the quarrel which, some thousand years since, it was considered by the sages was in the nature of things should be perpetuated between philosophy and poetry. Briefly to recapitulate, it is purely and entirely a delusion, a fallacy, and a snare, to regard the interests of the one as inimical to the interests of the other. The drawing-room supplements the club, just as the club would be incomplete without the drawing-room. True, we might live comfortably enough, dine excellently, and to a certain extent enjoy ourselves, were the institution of the drawing-room abolished to-morrow. But just as Mr. Disraeli declared, in the memorable oration, with its wealth of epigram and its opulence of paradoxes, in which he opposed Mr. Gladstone's Irish Church Bill, there was in man a certain faculty for religion, a certain void in his nature which religious veneration is calculated to fill, so too there is in man not less a certain faculty for the gentler amenities of life, a certain craving for social "sweetness and light" not to be gratified in the palaces sacred to males that make up the sum total of the architectural glories of St. James's Street or Pall Mall. "Where philosophy ends, religion begins;" where satisfaction of selfish luxury ceases to be a satisfaction,

precisely at that point is the sway of the drawing-room inaugurated. Modern life is indeed a dualism; but it is the dualism of union, not of opposition. The club and the drawing-room should be regarded rather as the high contracting parties to an alliance than as natural and irreconcilable foes. In the majority of cases, as we have stated elsewhere, it is the *habitué* of the club who feels the need of the drawing-room most. With all its comforts there is a monotony in club life which is insupportable.

As an instrument in the development of masculine character, the drawing-room is clearly an institution to which mankind has every reason for being grateful. The levelling tendencies of club life, so far as all idiosyncracies are concerned, have been noticed. If male humanity were submitted to no other expanding process than that realized in the atmosphere of the club, all men would be absolutely facsimiles of each other. It is here that the drawing-room comes in as a corrective: men see each other, and talk with each other under a new aspect, and amid a completely changed set of influences. It is the introduction of the female element which works the metamorphosis. Throw half-a-dozen men together, and their great aim will be to comport themselves as models of stoical impassivity. Let the scene be removed to a drawing-room, with a fair share of feminine occupants possessed of agreeable social gifts, and the demeanour of these gentlemen will be immediately altered. It will

be their object rather to assert individual differences of character and of acquirements than to swamp them in one stereotyped phase of uniformity. In this way it is not too much to say that one man often learns more of another by six minutes' association with him in a drawing-room than by six years' habitual converse with him in a club.

During the earlier portion of the present year of grace we were favoured with a constant stream of announcements touching the formation of a ladies' club: a genuine ladies' club, possessing nothing in common with that novel gynæceum in Newman Street that has been started for the benefit of young women who, working hard with their needles during the day, have no home firesides round which to gather at night, but a club instituted precisely on the model of those joint-stock palaces which flourish so numerously in the metropolis to minister to the pleasure and ease of unregenerate bachelordom. If we are not mistaken, we have been threatened with such a movement any time during the last ten years. But in spite of threats it has come to nothing, and the ladies' club is still a thing of the future. Without wishing to throw cold water on the enterprise, we may still be allowed to say that this is precisely what we should have expected, and that there really appears to be very little place or purpose for such an innovation. What is supposed to be the *raison d'être* of the institution? What definite place can there be assigned to it in the complicated economy of modern club life? In a word, what have ladies to do with clubs?

Now, we have seen that the existing clubs of St. James's Street and Pall Mall—however much they may be railed against in feminine philippics—have certain very distinct and intelligible objects to fulfil. To the idle man they afford a resource, without which he would simply be an incumbrance on his household, always in the way, perpetually interfering, where he would have no business to interfere. To the man of many occupations they are not less valuable, on the ground of the change of scene which is to be found within their walls. But it can only be by an extremely vicious species of analogy that any of these arguments can be supposed to hold good when they are applied to the other sex. The functions which clubs discharge for men, are already discharged in another fashion and by other means for women. The career which clubs may be regarded as opening up for a certain order of men, is opened up for women already. The only end which it can be proposed that a ladies' club should fulfil is that of a place of lounge and of pleasure. But this ground is occupied. Under the existing *régime* ladies have plenty of facilities for whiling away waste moments in a pleasurable lounge. Men have them, but they have them in their clubs: once abolish these, and they would not. The reason of this difference is not far to seek. The kingdom which is pre-eminently subject to female sway exists now—"at the present time of writing," to quote the newspaper phrase. It is the drawing-room. And the opportunity for that lounge which men find in the bay-

window of the club for gossip and scandal, which the lords of the creation realize in the smoking-room—what is the precise *analogue* for that in the woman's world? We reply, In the institution of morning calls. Woman, if she is anything—we must apologize for the blunt terms in which our definition is couched—is a calling animal: man is not. It is the morning visit which supplies our women with those seasons for the interchange of prattle and chat that our men find in their casual meetings with friends and acquaintances at the club. Women have always something to do as it is; without clubs, men would not. If the worst comes to the worst, a woman can always superintend her household: she cannot, in fact, be in the way too much. With man this order of things is diametrically removed. Club life, such as we know it, had a distinct and intelligible purpose to achieve, and achieved it; the new sort of club life which it is suggested should be instituted, can accomplish none of these ends, simply because they do not exist.

As for the argument that the institution of clubs exercises an influence antagonistic to the institution of matrimony, we consider that this clumsy pretext has already been sufficiently exposed. At most, clubs can only be considered to act as the drag which prudence puts upon the wheel of passion. They may occasionally retard the consummation; they do not mar the design. But let us look at the converse of this plea. The drawing-room standing in much the same relation to the one sex that the

club does to the other, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the real or imaginary effects of the club on men will be paralleled by the real or imaginary effects of the drawroom on women. We have investigated and refuted the proposition that "Why don't the men propose, mamma?" is a refrain the inspiration of which can at all properly be considered to have emanated from the club. Is it not just possible that the true secret of its origin is to be found elsewhere, and that the real source of the timidity of young men in assuming the matrimonial fetters is to be ascribed to no other motive power than to that of the drawing-room?

Heaven forbid that we should here go into that nauseatingly reiterated theme, which is summed up in the phrase on which French sciologists love so to debate, and against which the Holy Father seems to have conceived a sacred passion for issuing periodical edicts,—*Le luxe effréné des femmes.* But let us look at the question for a moment calmly and judicially—Is it the club or the drawing-room to which is mainly attributable the alleged reluctance of our young men towards appearing in the *rôle* of fathers of families? A woman without a drawing-room is a queen without a throne. The drawing-room is one of the first requisites of fashionable or even of civilized existence. It must be had; and it is not to be had for nothing. It is an expensive necessity. Young Simperton walks into Mrs. Singleville's drawing-room. He merely intended leaving a card, but the family are in; it is now

half-past four, and will he not stay and have a cup of tea with them? Simperton is an impressible but not very pecunious youth, and the three Miss Singlevilles, *jam aptæ viro*, are very delightful young ladies. They have just come in from a drive, and most exquisite they look, in the neatest toilettes and costumes that the genius of Mr. Jay can turn out. Then the drawing-room is a charming room, beautifully furnished, and eminently comfortable. Simperton walks away in an ecstasy. Last summer he very nearly lost his heart to Miss Singleville *secunda*, soon after their first meeting in the Tyrol. He feels that it is all up with him now. As it is, Simperton has a little competence of his own, but nature has endowed him with no superfluity of brains, and he does not see his way towards realizing immediate opulence. He leaves the Singlevilles' house, however, full of the purpose of proposing at the first available opportunity. He dines at his club, and becomes philosophical. "By Jove, sir, what am I to do with a wife who is used to Lydia Singleville's style?" mournfully murmurs little Simperton to himself. As we have said, we apologize a hundred times for mooting a topic so threadbare, but in the conscientious performance of our task we could not omit all mention of it here.

We have not the least wish to appear or to be the champions of the young man of the day. The tribe is to a superficial observer very much the reverse of estimable. Our young men are selfish, silly, conceited, shallow, and

indisposed to steady or continuous industry. It is customary to say that these habits are promoted and these traits of character deepened by the action of club life and its influences. But, after all, the existence of our youth is not wholly consumed in the clubs that they frequent. They move and have their being elsewhere as well: a great portion of their lives is passed not in the club at all, but in the drawing-room. It is in general society that the qualities which we have just enumerated, the shallowness, the vanity, the littleness, and the conceit, make themselves manifest. Even if it be granted that of these habits the seed may have been sown by the pernicious life they lead at the club; ought not the drawing-room to be the corrector of these vile club manners?—Assuming that club manners they can correctly be called. Instead—what is it? Young Heaviside strolls into Lady Tyghtefytte's *salons*—her ladyship receives that evening—and straightway commences to ventilate his abominable airs. He playfully rallies Miss Golightly on a thousand little matters: he is jocose and chatty. In other words, his demeanour is arrogant, insolent, and generally insupportable. In our own opinion it is impossible to conceive of any type of conduct more utterly ill-bred and odious than that bearing towards women which certain of our young men affect as *distingué* and good style. All this is done in the drawing-room. It may be said to have its origin in the club. In the first place, we deny the truth of the statement; in the second place,

were it even correct, it is surely as much the fault of those towards whom it is displayed as those who themselves display it, that it is tolerated outside the club.

Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of the club towards modern society is, that it has not merely multiplied themes of conversation for men, but that it has established a species of stock exchange for the manufacture and interchange of gossip. Just as the betting-man has a Tattersall's, where he can go with a certainty of discussing and hearing discussed the topics that are nearest his heart, so the club man has but to repair to friends at the club for the purpose of collecting an indefinite amount of chit-chat and scandal, of a kind peculiarly adapted for the male palate. In this way clubs have imparted to the talk of men, and the subjects in which men delight, a surface, a prominence, and an importance which are new. What do the clubs say? that constitutes the popular idea of the be-all and the end-all of the *répertoire* of masculine ideas and the fund of small interest. Club talk in its way is an excellent thing; and, regarded as a concretion and amalgam of worldly criticism upon current affairs, may possess a sound practical value. But it is to be objected to elsewhere than in the mouths of club men, or at least men. Now, it is here that the feminine tact and talent of the drawing-room is wholly and entirely at fault. There is scarcely a drawing-room which it is possible to enter without finding the latest novelties in club scandal, the last-fired *bons-mots* of the smoking-room, launched at you

by an angel in white muslin, or a seraph in mauve-coloured silk. The idea seems to have gone abroad that to captivate men, a certain masculine disguise must be assumed; that men like to hear women talk with an air which intimates that they are behind the scenes, and that the surest way to the male heart is to approach it through the avenue of club *on dits* or stable slang. In the case of raw cornets of dragoons, and beardless boys who have just got into the Guards' Club, these tactics may be crowned with a partial success. But the taste for them soon wears off. Men seek the society of women not because they desire a weak and watery *réchauffé* of what they have had already elsewhere. Femininess *per se* is an attraction and a charm. The drawing-room and the club have each of them, as we have shown, their special functions to perform; separately they each have their value; a confusion only destroys the virtue of both.

CHAPTER II.

TYPICAL DRAWING-ROOMS.

The Drawing-room Woman's true kingdom — Mrs. Harry Maldon's Drawing-room — Mr. and Mrs. Crump at home — The Country-house Drawing-room — Hatherton Hall — The Drawing-room at the Parsonage — "The Three Graces."

It is not merely as the field of her conquests and the sphere of her glories that the drawing-room necessarily recognizes woman as its presiding genius. All that certain lofty-lineaged matrons and maidens of high degree may know of the drawing-room as an institution is, that it is a species of temple specially dedicated to their worship and glorification; all that they may contribute towards the maintenance of the ceremonial is the preservation of a condescendingly attractive manner and agreeable address. But the bulk of our English women have far more to do with the drawing-room than this. The drawing-room is pre-eminently their kingdom for other reasons than that—it is their chosen ground of display. In English homes—we are writing just now neither for duchesses nor peeresses in their own right, but for plain gentlewomen—the drawing-room is essentially the creation of the lady of the

house, just as much as the snuggery is designed on the pet principles of the lord and master. To our minds an Englishwoman who did not care about the look of her drawing-room, who did not arrange with her own hands, or supervise with her own eyes each particular detail of its decoration, would be just as abnormal a development as one who felt no anxiety about her personal appearance, or as a mother who did not rack her brains to clothe her children in the most effective costume. Drawing-rooms there may be and are which are ordered and exist without this elaboration of feminine effort; the drawing-rooms of bachelors and the like. This, however, is an exceptional calamity, upon which no general dictum can be based; and a drawing-room without a presiding genius in the shape of an English wife or daughters, is very much like the play of 'Hamlet' with the part of Hamlet left out.

It needs a very small amount of observation directly you enter one of these apartments to detect the existence or the absence of the mistress of the house. Be the furniture ever so costly, the carpet ever so rich, the curtains, the tapestries, and draperies ever so rare—all these things, if there is not the ineffable air of finish which the legitimate queen of the drawing-room alone knows how to impart, are but as the tinkling brass and the sounding cymbal. This chamber which we have just entered is the drawing-room of Benjamin Bigg, Esq., in his mansion, Russell Square. We may save ourselves the

trouble of making an inventory of its contents. It is sufficient to say, that Mr. Bigg, soap merchant, is not a man who goes in for Brummagem decorations or spurious gimcracks. Real worth and solidity are what he admires—as in business so in everything else. Still his drawing-room lacks that indescribable grace that is beyond the reach of the mere housekeeper's art; and Mr. Bigg is a childless widower. On the other hand, walk up into the drawing-room of Mr. Harry Maldon, barrister-at-law, whose house is pleasantly situated in a convenient street of Tyburnia. You may trace the disposing influence of Mrs. Maldon everywhere, in each particular corner and niche, in the posture of each chair, and the arrangement of the knick-knacks on the mantel-piece. Not a morning passes without little Mrs. Maldon, as soon as ever her husband has gone off to chambers, tripping up-stairs to take a masterly survey over her drawing-room. With what inexpressible tenderness and taste does she place and replace the handsomely bound volumes which lie on the table, in order that the most telling effect of colour may be secured! How daintily does she fix the flowers in each separate vase, and how affectionately does she finally eye and criticize the whole! These little offices cannot be performed by hirelings. A perfect drawing-room, unless there is a mistress of the house to superintend it, is simply a contradiction in terms. If you can tell the character of a man from the titles of the books that are on his library shelves, it is certainly safe to say that you can tell the

character of his wife from the general aspect which his drawing-room presents. We repeat, a woman who takes no pride and feels no vanity in this portion of her *ménage*, is wanting in one of the most valuable of womanly qualities. The special function which woman in the social economy has to discharge has a dash of decorativeness about it.

The drawing-room! What a host of different social images does the expression conjure up! Certainly there are drawing-rooms and drawing-rooms. In the same ratio that the multitude of opinions stand to the multitude of men, do the drawing-rooms of society to the various social grades of our complex modern civilization. The theories upon which the establishment of the drawing-room are based are legion, just as are the views which may be taken of its proper and legitimate function. In a wide sense we are justified in using the drawing-room as a synonym for polite society in general; for the remainder of the present chapter we shall employ it in its more literal acceptation. If the classes into which the drawing-room admits of subdivision are numerous, it follows that there must be certain types which may be taken as fairly representative of their order. These typical drawing-rooms we shall endeavour to summarize as accurately as may be.

Who is there to whom the mention of the drawing-room of the country-house does not bring up a host of thrice pleasant memories? 'Tis a thing to be found at best occasionally. The notion of country-house life has

become in these days subject to a course of systematic abuse. Mr. Jeremiah Crump takes a villa somewhere in Surrey, "handy," as he calls it, to the railway line, and straightway proceeds to dignify it with the title of his country-house. Lamentable misnomer! Shakespeare may indeed have been wrong when, in putting into the mouth of Juliet the contemptuous rhetorical inquiry, "What's in a name?" he attempted to depreciate the value of all mere terms of nomenclature; still there are limits even to this influence and Jeremiah Crump will not be able to realize the ideal of country-house life simply because he imports the *ménage* of Bloomsbury to the breezy slopes of suburban Surrey. No; when we speak here about the country-house drawing-room, we are sticklers for accuracy of definition. Let us proceed to unfold its meaning. We will select as an instance Hatherton Hall and its drawing-room as a notable exemplification of the country-house *salon*. Breakfast is over; and the breakfast hour at Hatherton is conveniently elastic, reaching from, say, nine till twelve; or, if you like it, Raikes the butler will give orders to have your *déjeûner* served on that exquisite set of Sèvres china, and placed on the little oblong walnut-wood table in the bay window of the apartment, pleasantly termed by the Squire his "study," overlooking an old-fashioned bowling-green, smooth as any board of green-baize, and ten times more fragrant. However this may be, your breakfast is over. Your letters have been read—that is to say, if your nerves are

sufficiently strong to enable you to face such an ordeal, and to muster up courage enough not to relegate them to perdition, actual and metaphorical. The day is all before you where to choose, and you want to know what is to be done. As a preliminary to arriving at this critical decision, you stroll out on the lawn and smoke a cigar. You come to the conclusion that you don't feel up for much. Perhaps your day yesterday with the South Downshire was a little too fatiguing, or the covert shooting tried you too much, or the cucumber with the salmon has given you a dash of dyspepsia, or you sat up just a trifle beyond the prudent hour in the billiard-room, indulging in devilled bones and short whist, to say nothing of hot brandy-and-water, when you would have been far better employed in the fruition of your beauty sleep; or perhaps—well, why pry into these impertinent details?—to put it shortly, you are not up to the mark. Will you shoot? No, you won't. Will you fish? Not to-day, you think. Have you any intention of writing the letters that you ought to write? My good fellow, not the slightest in the world! Under these circumstances, then, it will probably occur to you as pre-eminently the best thing you can do, to stroll into the drawing-room. You are sure to find Lady Charlotte and the ladies there, and though you will most likely receive a perfumed volley of feminine vituperation, because you are idling away so promising a day, you have a tolerably shrewd notion that you will be able to consume the time not disagreeably.

In the drawing-room at Hatherton Hall! What a concert of sweet sights and sounds — we refer not to the thumping of pianos, nor to the strumming of harps—what a harmony of delicious odours! Some dozen English ladies of ages various, varying from—well, not to put too fine a point on it—sixty—and an English matron of sixty has not fewer beauties than a damsel of sixteen—to that exquisite period which in the sterner sex is hobbadahoyhood, but which is to women what the first opening flush is to the rose—all of them engaged in pursuit of the usual profitless occupations of the country drawing-room, chit-chat devoid of aim, and gossip minus scandal, the weaving of canvas, and the manufacture of marvellous tissues of embroidery, which, like the web of Penelope, are always on the high road towards completion, yet are never quite finished; a musical rustle of silk dresses, and—yes we are devoutly thankful to think that here at least muslins are tolerated—the melodious flutter of dresses that are not silk; a complexity of enchanting odours, to which you are indebted neither to Piesse, nor Lubin, nor Rimmel, but to those glorious flower-beds that send up their incense through the open windows; an atmosphere, in short, of natural delicacy rather than artificial refinement; this, and much more than this, is what you are still able to find in a country-house drawing-room in the course of that beatific interval between breakfast and lunch. Of course you have no business here; by rights you ought, as you will with an air of reproach, that is simply another form of

welcome, be told, to be disporting yourself after the manner of your brother muscular Christians. But the pleasure is not on this account the less perfect or the less pure. What witchery can there be more consummate than those of the influences which surround you? The hour for the severer discipline and the more rigid airs of the drawing-room has not yet come. Everything is *au naturel*. And to you in your present languid condition, bored as you are by those ominous superscriptions on those still more ominous blue envelópes thrust away into the capacious oblivion of your coat-pockets, haunted as you may be by the conviction that your book on the Leger is constructed on principles bound to ruin you—what more soothing balm in Gilead could there be? You lounge on an ottoman, or you sink upon the velveted recesses of an arm-chair. If you want an audience, you can address yourself to the fair occupants of the room in general; if you desire a confidence, you can unfold your bosom to the tenant of the seat next you in particular. If your turn is poetical, you can talk Tennyson and glance through the 'Idylls of the King.' Perhaps you have vague notions of putting up at the ensuing general election for the county-town; well, even on this assumption, you could have chosen no better canvassing ground. If you find a difficulty in securing the support of the husband, it is always sound policy to flirt with the wife.

The drawing-room is, as we have said, the true domain, the legitimate sphere of woman. You can never realize

this profound truth more perfectly or more agreeably than when the drawing-room is that of a country-house, and when the time which you choose for a tour of inspection is about the period in the day that we have specified. It is then, and only then, that you can see women radiant in the plenitude of their natural grace, in the perfect abandon of their manner, in the display of all those well-bred artifices which may beguile you out of your cares, or wheedle you out of your heart. Do you wish feminine society *pur et simple?* you have it then. Do you wish to trifle with hearts? when can you do it better than now? Have you an ambition to cultivate an affection *au grand sérieux?* this is your opportunity. Are you imbued with a tinge of selfish vanity?—and who is not?—this is the time for the indulgence of your pet weakness. By the period that a man has passed the seventh lustrum of his existence he begins to weary of an eternal round of bullfinches and trainers. Young subalterns, with their horsy talk, and their club smoking-room slang become nuisances. *Blazé*, of course, they are—but then in these days young gentlemen fresh from Eton or Harrow emulate the bearing of Sir Charles Coldstream himself. Still, however this may be, it would be difficult to find a more grateful ground on which to disport himself than that of the drawing-room of a country-house—Hatherton Hall for instance, where the company is well selected, and the males are ostracized to trout-stream or covert, on a fine August morning.

Perilous places for the unattached male, these drawing-

rooms of the country. And they need not be on the same scale as the *salon* of Hatherton Hall, that we have recently quitted, to be full of snares and pitfalls for the susceptible heart that beats beneath the shirt-front of manhood. Let us bid adieu to the squire, and visit for a while the manse of the parson. He is out, we are told, but "the young ladies are in the drawing-room." Well, we may miss our theology, but what we lose in that direction we shall at any rate gain in the picturesque. You may search throughout the whole of Downshire, and not come across three prettier girls than the Miss Prestons — "The Three Graces" is the appellation by which they are very generally known—and we will defy Mr. Millais himself to give us a more romantically attractive picture than these young ladies as they appear this afternoon in the parsonage drawing-room. The apartment possesses not the stately dimensions or the *recherché* ornaments of the drawing-room at the Hall. Nevertheless, it is furnished with exquisite taste, and there floats through it a sweetly delicate and subtly aromatic odour from the rose and jasmine creeper that trail round the windows. Mr. Preston is a widower, and his three daughters keep house for him. This drawing-room in which you now are is at all points the work of their hands. It was they who devised the chintz covering for the couches and chairs, who worked the banner screen, on which are wrought the arms of Mr. Preston's old college; who knitted—we hope we are correct in our phraseology — the antimacassars, and who spread that

elaborate cover over the ottoman. It is not surprising if these young ladies take a pleasure in what they have done. "The Three Graces:" and where could you witness a spectacle more refreshing to behold than here—where find anything more delicious than this scrupulously neat, though not formally stiff drawing-room, with its numberless signs on every hand of interested girlish industry? Thank Heaven, through this England of ours, there are countless parsonages with drawing-rooms such as those of the Rev. Henry Preston: thank Heaven that this love of innocent elegance lies as deeply implanted as it does in the breasts of our English maidens! There can be no better guarantee than this same trait of character, that there exists the material of a wife who will cause a home to smile, and bring sunshine to the hearth. No care is to be grudged that is devoted to the amenities of existence. Life is an ugly phenomenon enough; it is a pity that we do not esteem more highly the moments which are spent on the endeavour to deprive it of some of its more salient features of hideousness. If there are persons who commit a folly and think they have perpetrated a heroism, it is to be regretted that there are also persons who are too apt to mistake æsthetic deformity for moral virtue. One of the true, and by no means the least important functions which the drawing-room has to discharge is that of being a species of shrine in which these notions of sweetness and light, that Mr. Matthew Arnold tells us we know nothing about, are perennially kept alive—a

central star of innocent elegance, the beams from which may healthily illuminate the whole of the remainder of the house. It is the symbol of a world of æsthetic loveliness, into which no perturbing idea of mundane deformity ought to enter.

CHAPTER III.

TYPICAL DRAWING-ROOMS—*continued.*

Drawing-rooms for Use and for Show — A call at Mrs. McGrudder's — The Drawing-room of the Maiden Aunt — Miss Chippins — The Buffle Drawing-room — *Il sent de neuf* — Col. Ramnugger's Drawing-room — True theory of the Drawing-room.

In a rough way our drawing-rooms may be considered to admit of a bipartite division—those that are for use and those that are merely for show. How far either of these classes can be said to include the true ideal of a drawing-room, or how far it may partake of the nature of a mean, lying somewhat between the two orders, is a matter for subsequent investigation. Who has not had painfully practical experience of drawing-rooms which are obviously intended for no further end than that of social demonstration and display? Who does not see, as we mention them, visions rise before him of apartments full of an atmosphere of austere rigidity and icy cold discomfort—visions of sofas, chairs, and couches swathed in suits of brown holland, of chandeliers clad from top to bottom in complete garments of auriferous gauze, and of all the other divers signs and tokens which intimate to you that the chamber in which you are is resorted to only on state

occasions, and is altogether too gorgeous in its fittings, furniture, and surroundings for ordinary mortals.

Such a drawing-room as this is that which constitutes the main central glory of the McGrudder's mansion in Connaught Square. You have to make a morning call of congratulation, condolence, or ceremony at this most inhospitable of houses. You announce your arrival by a knock and a ring. If you were disposed to cast your eyes in that direction, you might see one of the Miss McGrudders noting the fact of your advent from one of the dining-room windows. The intelligence is immediately conveyed to Mrs. McGrudder, who is probably down in the kitchen, superintending the arrangements for the household dinner. A rush up stairs on the part of madame and her two daughters ensues, and presently—you have waited long enough to make you reiterate the announcement of your coming through the medium of knocker and bell—a small page-boy comes to the door. Into the drawing-room of the McGrudder family, with all due parade, you are ushered. Mrs. McGrudder and the young ladies will be with you immediately. Immediately is a figure of speech, and means, by interpretation, fifteen minutes. The day is, perhaps, bitterly cold, but the McGrudder grate is ignorant of a fire, just as the chamber that is your receptacle is lamentably devoid of the least air of warmth, comfort, or snugness. You button your coat more tightly round, every now and then survey your watch—probably you have a pressing appointment to keep

in half-an-hour's time—and wonder when the ladies of the family will deign to notice you. Very dismal is the room, very stiff and very severe is everything in it, from the piano, which you can tell by a glance is opened only on special gala days, to the books on the table, which no mortal hands are intended to open. In sails Mrs. McGrudder, arrayed in the full panoply of her walking dress: ditto the two Miss McGrudders.

"We were just going out," says Mrs. McG. "I hope you haven't found it cold," continues this dear creature in the sweetest of tones, "without a fire; but the fact is, as we have to be out calling this afternoon, and as we have found it close—positively close,"—here you smile or bow with a grim assent,—"we thought we would not have the fire lit."

And this bare-faced falsehood Mrs. McGrudder tells with the blandest look and in the most insinuating accents. By the way, what is the special charm in these petty falsehoods of society? They are never believed, they deceive nobody, and therefore presumably they cannot gain their object.

Contrast with such a drawing-room as that of Mrs. McGrudder's the comfortable little *salon* into which you are introduced when your inclination or a sense of the politenesses of life leads you to visit Mrs. Delancy and her charming daughters, at their house in Porchester Terrace. The Delancys live in their drawing-room. If you have refinement on every side of you, you have also

comfort. You have no sooner entered the apartment than one of the Miss Delancys, who was occupied with the last new novel from Mudie's, rises, and insists on planting you in her place—we are assuming, of course, a tolerable amount of intimacy existing between yourself and the family which you visit. In short, the room is habitable and habited. You feel instinctively that you are surrounded by human nature, and not—as was the case in the McGrudders' drawing-room—that the only other occupants of the apartment but yourself are certain lay figures in the shape of inhospitable hostesses and unaccommodating furniture.

Who does not know the drawing-room which we shall characterize as the old maid's drawing-room? Who is there that has not, somewhere or other amongst his stock of memories, reminiscences of a certain apartment in the house of a maiden aunt, which he used to enter in the days of his childhood with sentiments of reverence amounting to absolute awe? Can he not see, even now at this distance of years, the outline of the chamber and all its contents, which used to act as such a wet blanket upon the ardour of his juvenile spirits? Is he not able to recall to mind the impressive warnings not to touch the glossy panels of this chiffonier, or to approach within a discreetly respectful distance of that mammoth china vase? Does he not see, if he will but make the most insignificant demands upon his memory, the figure of an elderly lady seated erect in an arm-chair, engaged with her knitting,

and every now and then propounding questions relative to the progress which her dear nephew had made in his studies? The old maid's—we mean nothing disrespectful by the title—is pre-eminently a typical apartment. Directly you enter it you see signs of the proprietorship—there is a primness in the atmosphere, an exactness and precision in the disposition of each separate article of furniture to be met with nowhere else. Then, again, there is an abundance of antique relics and old-fashioned knick-knacks in the old maid's drawing-room that instantly stamps it. Glance over the mantel-piece, and you will see what you may certainly search for in vain elsewhere among the drawing-rooms of polite humanity in this year of grace—a whole series of those curious little profiles fashioned of black paper and standing out in clear relief against a background of white, which were to another age much what photographic portraits are to this. These quaint miniatures depict the features of nephews and nieces, for each and all of whom the aunt is supposed to keep a warm place in her affections. Much of the decorative element in the old maid's drawing-room is the result of the thoughtful generosity of her friends. Walk, for instance, into the drawing-room of Miss Chippins's villa at Sydenham. Do you see those beautiful specimens of floriculture blooming on the central table? They only arrived this morning—a present from Mr. and Mrs. Sharpe, next door, who are blessed with a numerous family, and who fondle the idea that the little

Sharpes have made an impression upon the maidenly heart of Miss Chippins. Presently a knock comes at Miss Chippins's drawing-room door: it is the trusty Martha, Miss Chippins's own private maid. "If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Cormorant hopes you will kindly accept a branch of grapes. Mrs. Cormorant has just received a large present of fruit from the country." Miss Chippins has not the slightest objection to the gift. As she receives, she smiles shrewdly to herself. She is far too cautious, astute, and wary an old bird to be snared by any such artifices as these. She knows perfectly well the value and significance of Mrs. Cormorant's grapes; she also guesses, and, as it happens, correctly in this case, that the whole story of their being, in the first instance, a present to her—Mrs. Cormorant—is an entire myth, and that the real state of the case was that Mrs. Cormorant—remembering once she had heard her—Miss Chippins—express a weakness for hot-house fruit—desired Mr. Cormorant, on his way home from the City, to drive into Covent Garden and invest in a pound or so, for the purpose of giving them, at second hand, to that dear old Miss Chippins. Deluded Sharpes—mistaken Cormorants! *Scilicet et veniet tempus*—yes, the time will assuredly come when good Miss Chippins will be gathered to her fathers, when the Will will duly be read, on the completion of the obsequies, and when Miss Chippins's sedulous adorers in Sydenham and its neighbourhood will find, to their horror and indignation, that the old wretch has left out of sight

all their little kindnesses and delicate attentions; and, having pensioned off an old servant or two, has bequeathed the bulk of her property to her scapegrace nephew Jack, who is at sea, and whom she has not seen for years.

Il sent de neuf, was the comment of Talleyrand on acceding to the pressing invitation of a friend, to whom the vehicle was a new acquisition, to enter his brougham: and there is a large class of drawing-rooms to whom the remark of the French wit may be applied as a comprehensive and not inexact description. Let them do what they will, let them arrogate the most consummate airs of long habituation to the atmosphere of the surrounding splendour,—it makes no difference: they will never be able to lose their innate sense of the novelty of the situation, just as the situation will never be deprived of its inherent strangeness for them. *Il sent de neuf.* Take the case of the Buffle family. Buffle is eminently one of the *nouveaux riches.* He started from very small beginnings—was a clerk at a few shillings a-week, or commenced life by sweeping out his employer's office. But Buffle has risen, has become rich, is the occupant of an imposing villa, and the father of a family, with a decided taste for finery and show. Everything in the Buffle drawing-room is spick and span new: and everything is of the most perfect description that money can purchase. You enter, and you are dazzled by the multiplicity of mirror-glasses which you see on every side. The couches, chairs, and ottomans are covered either with the most gorgeous satin or the richest velvet.

As for the carpet, you almost fear to tread upon it, so thick and yielding is its luscious softness to the foot. Then look at the pictures. No old paintings mellowed by age, and full of the interest that attaches to prized family heirlooms. Everything painfully new. A few oils that stare you out of countenance: chromos fresh from their warehouse in Regent Street, and water-colours which have been expressly painted for Buffle.

In an evil hour some demon whispered to Buffle, "Have a taste." And a taste Buffle straightway possessed himself of. Go down and dine with Buffle. He will give you a capital dinner, and wines which, one is thankful to say, break the monotony of this novelty and are undeniably old. "As you won't 'ave some more claret, says Buffle—if you are a man of appreciating taste and discriminating palate, you have more than drunk fair with your entertainer in the matter of that second magnum of Lafitte—"we will go into the drawing-room and join the ladies." Heavens! what a display of newness! There is Mrs. Buffle, transcendantly gorgeous in her bran new satin, and the Miss Buffles, who take the hint of novelty from their mamma. Then, just as you are suggesting music, Buffle himself walks up to you, and, insisting upon pointing out to you minutely the merits of the various pictures that grace his walls, is obliging enough to expatiate to you *ad infinitum* on all their traits of artistic ingenuity. Poor Buffle is not always infallible in the matter of pronunciation, and occasionally makes curious

mistakes. For instance, he will select for your special admiration a sculptured group representing "'Ercles and 'Eyelash:" or he will treat you to an interesting little disquisition on the respective excellences attained by "Salvata Rosy" and "Paul Potter." After you have discussed your tea, Buffle turns round and flatly asks you what you think of "his little crib." "'Ad the carpet manufactured after a design of Mrs. Buffle's own; all the furniture made expressly for me, and gave an unlimited order to Easel to select the pictures," hints to you your friend. All of which information may be and probably is perfectly correct: only in your heart of hearts you do not quite see why, on the strength of this intelligence, as to the originality of design of all the articles in Buffle's drawing-room, you should admit them to have any inherent superiority over what is to be met with elsewhere.

There is a certain species of drawing-room which must present itself to your imagination as the direct antithesis, the practical contradiction of the Buffle *salon*—it is the drawing-room of decayed gentility. Who does not know it? Who has not witnessed these apartments, in which there is ever going on a perpetual species of strife between the facts of the present and the traditions of the past? We are all of us acquainted with the tenants of these chambers—with the elderly gentleman who is the master of the *ménage*, as attenuated in figure as he is in circumstances, and with *madame sa femme*, who lives as it were on the interest accruing from that proud position of

prestige which once she is supposed to have occupied. The atmosphere is not one which is calculated to raise your spirits or pleasantly to occupy your time. You will be compelled to listen to an endless series of doleful reminiscences of the times that were. Col. Starcheley —for he it is whom we are now visiting—was erewhile a distinguished officer in India: he occupied a position that commanded everything. Mrs. Starcheley will entertain you for hours in succession with anecdotes of who they were, and what they did in India. As for the Colonel himself, he, like his furniture, is excellently bred, but worn out, and with the gloss of novelty taken off. And yet he receives you into his drawing-room, with its carpets that were precious once, but which are threadbare now, with the air of a grand signor. *Le gentilhomme est toujours le gentilhomme*, and Col. Starcheley is in his own esteem precisely what he was in the halcyon days when he had his villa, that was the pride of the Presidency, on the sweet slopes of Simla. Do you notice that the fittings of Mrs. Starcheley's drawing-room—whether it be in Bayswater, Cheltenham, Bath, or Leamington—are somewhat the worse for wear, that there is a dash of antiquity in the surroundings, and that the whole apartment gives you the impression of one whose fittings have seen their best days? Very possibly. There is undeniably an air of decay in all around you; but there are the traces of a style that was good, and the remnants of a splendour that was not ostentatious: the

collapse of the Great Obedjo Bank, the swindling practices of the secretary of the Great Narcoster Railway line —these may account to you for the effete magnificence of the Starcheley drawing-room. But after all, do you not find you have, to speak the honest truth, a greater liking for the impoverished refinement of the Starcheleys than for the vulgar ostentation of the Buffles?

So much by way of introduction to our great theme of drawing-rooms. We have instanced certain types, and these for the present must be sufficient. It is true that as yet we have been compelled to regard the drawing-room rather as a material structure than as the rendezvous of so many different specimens of humanity. But we shall have the opportunity of looking at it before very long in this latter aspect; meanwhile, before we proceed further with our subject let us pause for a minute to ask what a drawing-room ought to be—what is the ideal drawing-room like? It is evident that it is a place neither for vulgar ostentation nor for frigidly genteel reserve, neither for a lounge *en déshabille*, nor for a perpetual altitude of stilted ceremony. What women are to men, that the drawing-room should be to the club. Women it is who are the chosen occupants of the drawing-room; and in realizing the society of women, man should be able to transport himself into a region unruffled and undisturbed by the ordinary cares of humanity. He seeks indeed "human creatures not too good for human nature's daily food;" but while they satisfy his mundane requirements and

console his mental sorrows, they should not nip in the bud his ethereal aspirations. Let us apply this principle to the drawing-room. The drawing-room is *par excellence*, and, as its etymology denotes, the one apartment to which man is able to withdraw himself from the atmosphere of strife, mortification, and what not else, that encircles his daily existence. It is here that he should be able to forget for a while the wear and tear of play, the ceaseless din of politics, and the scandal of the club. It is here that he should be able to revert to a state of nature in which the only paramount consideration is the amenities of life, in which he is content to forget his troubles that are of the earth, earthy, and to quietly resign himself to a description of celestial sybaritism. *Mortales sumus: mortali sorte nascimur*, says Saint Augustine. Nevertheless, it is, or should be, the aim of the drawing-room to erect man above himself, and to transport him out of himself. The drawing-room should be a kind of casket full of deliciously civilizing odours, which remind man that, in spite of all the bustle and vulgar tumult of existence, there is still accessible a land of pure delight in which no place is found for these plebeian conflicts. Such is the true function, such the only worthy idea of the drawing-room; and in delineating it we have but sketched briefly and in outline the function of women. Do they know it? Do they exercise it aright? *O fortunatæ nimium sua si bona norint!*

CHAPTER IV.

DRAWING-ROOM USAGES.

Reasons for making the term Drawing-room as extensive as possible — Dinner at Lady Firebrace's — Punctuality *v.* Unpunctuality — Amendment suggested — The Awkwardness of the *mauvais quart d'heure* before dinner exaggerated by the desuetude into which Introductions have fallen — Drawing-room tact of the Hostess — Hints for Dinner Parties — "The Pleasure of a Glass of Wine" — The Ladies retire — After-dinner talk in the Drawing-room.

Sicelides musæ paullo majora canamus. Muses of society —and as verses of society are written, it is a warrantable inference that such butterfly divinities as these exist— adapt our veracious pen for sterner duties and for heavier tasks. As yet we have had but to indicate certain salient and typical features in the drawing-rooms of the day. We have been able to content ourselves with staying a minute here, or diverting to a few seconds there; we have glanced at the obtrusively novel splendour of our friend Buffle, and the threadbare gentility of Col. Starcheley; we have simply attempted to present in a sketchy and easy manner before our readers, gentle or ungentle, town or country, a few out of these many aspects which the drawing-room is capable, under certain circumstances, of presenting. But we must now exchange

this *dilettante* trifling for the grave functions of the chronicler. History, we have been aptly admonished before now, is but the precepts of moral philosophy reduced to practice, and the annals of the drawing-room must be considered to occupy a precisely analogous position to that science, which is in its youth as yet, if not in its infancy, sociology. If we have to portray, we shall also have ample occasion to suggest; if we have to perform the duty of accurate *raconteurs,* we shall not on that account be precluded from the necessity of now and again assuming the *rôle* of the reformer. We shall take things, indeed, as they are, but we shall also endeavour incidentally to point out what they should or might be.

For the present we shall not intrude ourselves upon the drawing-room during those hallowed hours which mark its dedication to the pure and unmixed service of women. We shall even rigidly exclude ourselves from the contemplation of a subject on which we shall have hereafter something to say—the question of morning calls—nor shall we as yet presume upon the privilege of the cousin who likes "five o'clock tea." We devote ourselves for a little space to the drawing-room as it is before dinner and after, with those reflections incident thereto that may from time to time arise. If at any period we should seem to transgress the limits of our original design, we must politely recall the attention of our readers to the observations made in the introductory chapter of this work. It will be remembered by them that, as a reason for comprehend-

ing the club and the drawing-room in the same work, we then dwelt upon the undeniable fact that the two together constituted the most important factors in our modern life, and that they are each of them respectively centres of our nineteenth century social civilization. It follows thus that whatever phenomena are not ascribable to, or do not fall within the domain of, the club, are properly referable to the drawing-room. The drawing-room is, in fact, an expansive and elastic term, and we must, under this head, make any remarks which we have to make as to the general construction and usages of society, which could not aptly be placed in that portion of our treatise that is now completed. If it is the club which may be said to constitute in the last place the social legislator and *elegantiarum arbiter* for men, it is the drawing-room that must be considered the prime source of legislation for society in general, when masculine vigour and feminine grace meet each other on a common ground of courtesy. Let us then to our task.

In one sense the day is over; in another sense it has but little more than just begun. The antagonism of the propositions merely depends upon the view which you take of life in general—whether it be that proper to business or pleasure. If the former, you may regard existence as having come to a standstill for the next twelve or fourteen hours; if the latter, you may regard the circle of dissipation and society as just inaugurating its preliminary spin. Big Ben has just boomed the hour of half-past

seven from his throne in Westminster clock-tower; the last carriage has just departed from the Drive, and the last equestrian from the Row; the internal vacuum, which nature abhors, is clamorous for replenishment, and the world in general is thinking about dinner. You yourself, who for the last hour and a half have been alternately studying the evening papers at the club, and surveying the floodtide of human existence as it has swept past the bay-window, lounge off to your chambers to dress for Lady Firebrace's dinner-party. It will be seen that we are starting on the assumption that you are positively able to don your evening clothes in the course of half-an-hour, and that you are not like that exquisite but inane Fitzfoodle, who has been boring you with his impertinent questions as to whether you intend going to Mrs. Mountebank's *tableaux vivants* this evening, whether he shall meet you at the Marchioness of Gloucester's ball, and whether you feel disposed to stroll with him, some time before eleven P.M., into the dressing-room of Miss Fitz Ferdinand, the tragic actress with the comic manner, at the Lyceum Theatre, and who declares he can never "get up full fig" —to use his own eloquent expression—unless he allows himself a clear sixty minutes. Thank Heaven, you are not like this puppy, and by eight o'clock you are fairly in your hansom—a quarter past eight was the hour marked on the card which Lady Firebrace issued—*en route* for Eaton Square. Punctuality happens to be your *forte*, and there are yet thirty seconds of the fifteen minutes to run,

when the hall-porter has opened the door, and the head butler—having received your name from one of his under-strappers—announces Mr. Phlunkie at the entrance to Lady Firebrace's drawing-room.

If our imaginary hero, Mr. Phlunkie, be the possessor of a nervous temperament, or of a tendency to moralize, it is probable that he may discover in the appearance of desolation presented to him by Lady Firebrace's drawing-room ample cause either for the trepidation of his nerves or the mental delivery of a long sermon. Has he mistaken the day or the hour? No. And the welcome which good-natured Lady Firebrace gives him is a sufficient reassurance. The simple truth is—he has been punctual, while every one else is unpunctual. 'Tis a marvellous thing, as some one or other with profound philosophical insight has observed, that dinner being the event of the day which every one with a moderately social disposition anticipates with such delight, the enjoyment of it should be universally deferred by mankind till the latest possible hour. In the name of civilized society; in the interests of entertainer and entertained; for the preservation of the equanimity of cooks and of mistresses; for the reason, if for no other, that exquisitely-manufactured dishes may be consumed at the ripe and fitting moment; nay, on the side of truth itself, and of the employment of language as a medium for the expression and not the concealment of thought, we protest against the monstrous dimensions which the curse of unpunctuality at dinner-parties has

acquired. You are asked for 7.15, and you do not make your appearance till 7.25, nor is dinner served till five minutes after the half-hour. Or you are asked for 7.30, and no one thinks of "showing up" before 7.45, and so on in a similar ratio. Even when you do enter the drawing-room—we are not now specifying Lady Firebrace's in particular, nor identifying you with our mythical hero, Mr. Phlunkie—ten minutes or fifteen after the hour for which you have nominally been invited, you will discover that even if the majority of the company is assembled, Sir George and Lady Smith are sure not to have arrived. You are dining, perhaps, with the good-natured Jenkinses. Jenkins himself is a capital fellow, and Mrs. Jenkins an excellent woman, though somewhat over-fond of a handle to one's name. Poor Mrs. Jenkins—as you can see by her short, disjointed sentences, uneasy and stolen glimpses at the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece—is on tenterhooks. Sir George and Lady Smith were to be, she had intended, the central figures—the hero and the heroine of the evening, and here their tardiness is literally spoiling the dinner. The turbot will be boiled to rags, the *entrées* will be tough as leather, or crisp as wafers; the whole thing will be a failure. "Very sorry to keep you waiting so long," remarks Mrs. Jenkins to an unsympathetic lady sitting on her right, with sharp nose, hungry eyes, and black lace shawl drawn tightly over her shoulders, "but Sir George and Lady Smith always *are* so late." Mrs. Jenkins, however, has scarcely com-

pleted this little speech of apology, when she feels as if a weight of some twenty tons had been taken off her mind by the shrill announcement, "Sir George and Lady Smith!" and arm-in-arm these two stiff-necked delinquents saunter in. Sir George is only a pompous City knight, proud, with nothing but his vulgarity to be proud of, and vulgar with his pride; and Lady Smith—well, perhaps the best way of putting it would be to say that it is said by the social detractors of Sir George Smith, that as an iron-merchant in the Minories he married his cook, because he could induce no one else to join him in mounting his own pet pinnacle of ambition. Still Sir George walks up to Mrs. Jenkins with an unctuous smile on his thick lips, and no apology, and Lady Smith, making the atmosphere murmurous with the rustle of her costly satin robe, has not the grace to hint to her host or hostess, truly or not, that they have been detained a few moments after their time by some pressing business which Sir George had. Nothing of the sort; without a blush of any kind for their sin, Sir George takes Mrs. Jenkins, and Lady Smith condescends to be led down by Jenkins.

It is perfectly true that guests of the Sir George and Lady Smith type are not invited to Lady Firebrace's *réunions*, but whether the custom of arriving some thirty minutes subsequent to the hour mentioned in the invitation be exemplified in the drawing-room of the countess or of plain Mrs. Jenkins, the principle of the thing is the same, and, in our opinion, equally unpardonable. If Lady

Firebrace, calculating on the unpunctuality of those whom she has invited, gives instructions that dinner shall not be on the table till half-an-hour later than the time named on her cards, well and good. Her ladyship may herself be caused no inconvenience, and may consequently have no ground of irritation against those who meet round her table. But that is not to the point. The real question is, Why should an hour be mentioned which it is not intended to adhere to? Is there any meaning in language, or is there not? It is plain that the habit of studied unpunctuality must affect the givers of dinners with various degrees of inconvenience or annoyance, according to their worldly position. That only makes the matter worse. If, in what are known as the higher circles of society, people come late to dinner parties simply in deference to established usage, there will be snobs on a less exalted level to adopt the practice simply from the *prestige* of the example. Why should we not take a hint from our law reformers strictly so-called, and periodically revise the code of manners which dictates social etiquette, just as we periodically revise those enactments which constitute the body of our national jurisprudence? Unless from time to time a judicious supervision is exercised, abuses are sure to spring up in both.

At any rate, in the case of the social phenomenon which we have noticed here, the evil has now become of such magnitude that it is evident there should be some alteration or extension of the existing social law, which would

reach and repress it. Is such a consummation entirely to be despaired of? We are not aware what may be the nature of the body from which the decrees of fashionable usage emanate, or what is the composition of that revising court which now abolishes an old law and now suggests a new one, or whether, indeed, any such corporation has a distinct and separate existence. However this may be, would it be altogether out of the question for society in general to arrive at some tacit *consensus* on this subject? Why should it not henceforth be universally recognized that the hour mentioned in the invitation was the hour at which dinner would be served, and that one or two minutes at the latest before that, it was expected that all the guests should be assembled? Or why, supposing that some more explicit arrangement were deemed desirable, should there not be two different hours named in the card or note of invitation—one that of dinner, another that at which it was requested that the guests might commence to assemble themselves, the space between the two being about twenty minutes, and it being understood that at the commencement of this preliminary half-hour the host and hostess would be in readiness to receive such of their friends as might choose to come thus early. A bad habit of this order will never disappear till it has received the emphatic stigma of society. If punctuality at dinner-parties were once recognized as the rule, unpunctuality as the exception, and if dinner givers would but follow the example of the Marquis in Theodore Hook's novel, who, when Sir

Harry Winscot arrives an hour after every one else, bids his servants supply the baronet with a wafer and an ice, recalcitrant exquisites, whether male or female, would cease to cherish the belief that rude eccentricity is an efficient substitute for a knowledge of the ways of good society.

We have digressed somewhat from the main incident which furnished us with the text for our theme. The digression, however, is thoroughly justified by the nature of the facts. Nor is it, as we have already hinted, by any means, with the mortification of the host or hostess consequent upon the melancholy conviction that a good dinner is meanwhile spoiling, that the evil results of this baneful practice terminate. At best the quarter of an hour in the drawing-room which precede the announcement of dinner generally merits the epithet of *mauvais;* and if the quarter of an hour be extended to half, the positive should be changed for the comparative, or even superlative, degree. Human skill will never be able to make for the majority of persons this space of time other than a species of torture, the submission to which constitutes the only means of the attainment of a dinner. Who, with testimony worth having, can say that he has ever entered an ordinary drawing-room before dinner and noticed that during the protracted period previous to the descent downstairs the face of each of its occupants wore a look of satisfied and easy happiness? Is there not invariably, to use a phrase of Lord Bacon's, "a certain strangeness in the atmo-

sphere?" Man eyes man uneasily. Ladies lack that sparkling inspiration of the small talk which the first spoonful of soup commences, and the first glass of champagne consummates. The unfortunate being who finds himself in a strange room surrounded by strange faces, and is also troubled with the constitutional curse of shyness, is absolutely in a fever of timidity. He turns over the leaves of photographic albums—those heaven-sent resources for bewildered mortals—with an air of wild desperation. He handles table ornaments in a manner that threatens imminent breakage, or eyes their beauties with the look of a man who meditates the suicidal plunge from Waterloo Bridge. Perhaps summing up an amount of courage, the display of which terrifies him, he asks the lady on his right whether she heard Mario last night? She does not happen to catch the question; he has to repeat it. Meanwhile there is a general lull in the conversation. His voice alone violates the profound calm, as in consequence all eyes are fixed upon him, and Mr. Blush Rose prays that the earth may swallow him up in the midst of his stuttering efforts to articulate the very ordinary interrogation which he has been called on to reiterate. Even if the punctuality of dining out were Utopian, the nuisance of this *mauvais quart-d'heure* would still be felt. It is aggravated tenfold by the presence of the practice which we have noticed.

Nor, in our opinion, by this alone. Walk in with our friend Mr. Phlunkie into Lady Firebrace's drawing-room.

The ante-dinner assemblage is considerable, for her ladyship entertains a larger number than usual of guests to-night. At one end of the apartment you will see some half-dozen wretched males congregated together, isolated from the remainder of the occupants of the room, as if they were pariahs, or were to be shunned like men smitten with leprosy. There is an intermittent buzz of conversation audible elsewhere in Lady Firebrace's drawing-room; but in that particular quarter to which these gentlemen are relegated there reigns a deathlike and mutual silence. Alternately they look out of window and look round at the company. One enterprising member of this select band of recluses, endeavouring to appear completely at his ease and entirely in his element, commences in an undertone to hum an opera air; another more audacious still, after giving various parts of his person and clothing a series of preliminary twitches, actually ventures to address one of his fellow-hermits, on some subject of very everyday interest indeed. He meets with a response of some kind, but not of a character to induce him to repeat the effort at starting a conversation; and the group once more relapses into a moody and melancholy stillness. Glance even generally round the room and you will become sensible of the presence of a pervading element of this stiffness and unsociability of demeanour. The talk, such as it is, proceeds by short spasmodic jerks. There is nothing whatever of that movement on the part of the human beings assembled in Lady Firebrace's drawing-room which

characterizes the meeting of homogeneous globules of mercury.

Now we do not pretend to say that we are in a position to specify in a single sentence the motive cause of all this; but of one thing there can be no reasonable doubt—the complete desuetude into which introductions have fallen in the drawing-room are chargeable in a very considerable degree with the features that we have depicted to our readers. At the present day it is considered not less monstrous a violation of the manners of good society to present two strangers to each other than it is to cut your bread at dinner, or to clamour for potatoes with your fish. The supremacy of sets in the routine of fashionable existence is greater than it ever was before. Persons are supposed to dine, dance, and visit only those who revolve in a precisely identical social orbit—never, in a word, to desert the charmed sphere of their own particular clique. The result of this affectation—for an affectation in every way it is—is the abolition of introductions. When it is accepted as a fact—though it is frequently in reality nothing more than a fiction—that if you are asked out to dinner you will meet with no one who is not more or less known to you already, what place can there be for these presentations? It is upon this theory we believe that the non-introducing system at present in vogue rests. As for the results of the practice, they are to be seen not merely in Lady Firebrace's drawing-room on the evening that we have visited it, but in hundreds of other *salons* as well.

Perhaps there is no greater field for the display of drawing-room tact on the part of the mistress than that afforded by the period of waiting which succeeds the arrival of the the guests, and precedes the announcement of the dinner. A woman who can stand the test of this trying season deserves to be decorated with a high badge of feminine distinction. There is art in the disposition of the guests as they lounge on couches or stand by windows and mantel-pieces; there is still greater art in securing a satisfactory system of pairing *en route* downstairs to dinner, of seeing that the right gentleman offers his arm to the appropriate lady, and that the dinner table is free from that intolerable dullness and *ennui* which arise from ill-assorted couples. Here is a case in point. You see that singularly attractive-looking young widow yonder, round whose chair flutter at least half-a-dozen swains, all of them vying with each other in casting glances expressive of passionate devotion at the lovely creature. There is De. Boots, of the Dancing Hussars, over head and ears in love with Mrs. Slender—that is her name—who is trusting earnestly to redeem the run of shocking bad luck which he has lately had by a brilliant matrimonial *coup*. De Boots is vain enough to fancy that if he can only make the running moderately to-night the game is his. He flatters himself that he has already produced more than a transient impression on Mrs. Slender, and that little more is wanted for the consummation of his purpose than the favouring opportunity of whispering sweet confidences and

amorous inanities into her ear, which a seat next her at dinner will afford. But then there are three or four other gentlemen in the room with exactly the same sentiments and convictions regarding Mrs. Slender as De Boots. There is young Mirabel, that ineffably self-conceited dandy of the French legation; there is Wimpole, of the Treasury; and there is the Hon. Percy Trevanion, who is something of a poet, and who entertains a secret belief that half the beauties of the metropolis are pining for the possession of his heart. Here is a problem for Lady Firebrace to solve. Her ladyship entirely understands the situation. She knows perfectly well that De Boots, Wimpole, Mirabel, and Trevanion all of them love the charming widow Slender in a nearly equal degree. The result is that this fascinating lady will be apportioned to neither of these exquisites, but will fall to the lot of an old country member, who, after he has said half-a-dozen words to her at dinner, will suddenly discover that he was an intimate friend of her late husband's father.

What an infinite power does the hostess in this way possess of dispensing a favour or indulging a spite! If you are in her good books you will be rewarded by being constituted the cavalier of that deliciously piquant Miss Fleur-de-Lis, whom, supposing you capable any longer of such weak emotions, you would absolutely worship. If, on the other hand, you have done aught at which Lady Firebrace, or whoever else your entertainer may be, has chosen to take offence, you will assuredly discover that you

are to be victimized by escorting old Mrs. Colonel Griffin, who will bore you to death with her thrice-told Indian stories, and the anecdotes of her old flirtations in the Hills. All the good things that you had specially committed to memory to say, all the specially interesting intelligence that you had gleaned from the columns of the evening papers will remain imprisoned still within you. You have not heart to cast down these conversational pearls before the Griffin as, by a certain clique of profane young men, she is commonly termed.

It scarcely comes within the legitimate scope of this work to lay down any very comprehensive body of laws on the subject of dinners and dinner-giving in general. So much legislation on these matters has been already promulgated, that the task is nearly superfluous, and if the discharge of the duty can effect any practical good, that good might have been expected to be achieved already. There are just one or two hints which we may venture to give for the benefit of those hosts who care to take advantage of them. In the first place, don't issue your invitations too early. Ten days' notice is quite sufficient for any ordinary dinner-party; it is a mistake to extend it to three weeks. In the second place, be sure that your table is not overloaded with fruit, flowers, or ornaments—the latter especially. How can you expect your guests to keep up a cross fire of conversation from opposite sides of the table, if there are interposed between them epergnes and vases of monstrous size, overgrown with a wild luxu-

riance of flowers, ferns, and herbage? It is not more important that your table should be brilliantly lit than that the view between those who are mutually *vis-à-vis* should not be obscured. In the third place, if you would gain for your dinner-parties a reputation on the ground of the conversation that accompanies them, as well as of the supreme excellence that their cookery displays, be sure not to discourage talk of a kind which timid hosts are in a perpetual panic lest, because it is to a certain extent professional, should be stigmatized as shoppy. Men discourse best on those subjects in which they are most interested, and it is on these that persons generally like best to hear them. It must be remembered that there is a not inconsiderable number of persons who go to a dinner-party for very much the same reasons that they consult an encyclopædia—to see what amount of practically useful knowledge they can pick up. The general notions of the majority of people are far more the results of oral communication than of the reading of books. If a politician, or a physician, or a barrister shows a disposition to give your guests his opinion on those subjects which specially come within his range, by all means suffer him to do so, provided he does so wittily and well, that he does not harp too much upon one strain, and that he can be prevented from degenerating into a conversational monopolist. This is a true policy for the management of talk at dinner; of course to be successfully carried out it requires, like every other policy, nice discrimination and

unflagging exercise of tact. In these matters there is no such thing as absolutely infallible legislation. The value of the precept depends upon the felicity of its application.

It is a fact which we can only bring ourselves to recognize with regret that there is a decided tendency at the present time, in spite of the highly artificial polish which our manners have received, to banish from the midst of us most of those suavities and amenities of custom which softened the asperities of existence, and sweetened the daily intercourse of man with man. Brusquerie exists, and is popular to a degree now that would have been considerably, absolutely, and insufferably bearish only a few years since. The sentiment of chivalry may not be altogether dead, but we have little enough of its development. The accepted fact of that systematic unpunctuality which has received our attention, is but another instance of a kind of reaction from the courtly school of a bygone age. The same thing may be said of the opprobrium which has been cast upon the practice of introductions; and as if wholly to smother all symptoms of goodwill towards our neighbours, and a kindly interest in their affairs, we have entirely relegated to the limb of exploded usages the significant, salutary, and benignant custom of "taking wine." It is from no mere unreasoning love of the venerable and the antique, that we deplore the extinction of this practice—a practice which, so long as we had it, was thoroughly intelligible, thoroughly laudable, and fruitful in a variety of practically beneficial results. In the old

days to ask your friend "to take a glass of wine with you," was the first step towards thawing the ice of ceremony and kindling the gentle flame of friendship. It acted upon two individuals in much the same way that the first pop of a champagne cork does upon the company assembled at dinner in general. It unloosed the tongues of the silent and caused to disappear, like the hoar-frost before the morning sun, the shyness of the reserved. You might ply a timid man in numberless ways, and they would all fail. You might endeavour in vain to search for some theme which would arrest his attention, create his interest, and generally serve to draw him out; but to ask him to take a glass of wine was often a resource which seemed to possess all the potency of magic. It acted as a species of reduction of all human differences to a common denominator: the modest glass of sherry was, as it were, the common ground on which you and your friend met. Meanwhile human nature has not changed; the nervous are nervous still, and the shy are shy. Customs have changed, and these victims of a constitutional self-distrust are robbed of a practice which operated with themselves and their neighbours as a real blessing. Nor is this all that may be said on the point. It is true that this taking of wine was merely a conventional symbolism of amity and good-will. But though conventional it was strictly real, and had, under certain circumstances, a very valid and living force indeed. You might be a barrister, and you were placed next at dinner to a brother lawyer, who had

been engaged that morning for the defence in a case in case in which you were for the prosecution. The rivalry between you was keen, and in the excitement some rather sharp things were rapped out on either side, which you have neither of you forgotten. To go up to your learned brother and say, "Jones, I am sorry for that little breeze we had" would be absurdly formal, and would seem like investing a matter that ought to be trivial with an exaggerated degree of importance. But it would be a very different thing to catch your rival's eye, and say, "Jones, the pleasure of a glass of wine," and under the old *régime* it was quite as significant and more eloquent in the way of conciliation than any words could be. It is needless to apply this principle to a greater number of cases. The instance which we have given will be sufficiently suggestive of the real practical utility which the custom of "taking wine" had as a method of harmonizing and simplifying the perplexing relations which may and will occasionally occur in the complicated network of existence.

Dinner over, the ladies have risen, the gentlemen are left to their claret, and we are in the drawing-room once more. Not by any means the least critical of a hostess's task, that giving the signal for the migration upstairs. It is one of those things which, to be perfectly successful, must be done exactly at the right time. Like an omelette, a moment too much or too little, the slightest fault on the side either of excess or defect, will inevitably spoil the effect of

the whole thing. If the party be one of any size, there is sure to be a difficulty in catching the eyes of all the ladies, young, middle-aged, and old, simultaneously. The Countess of Firebrace, for instance, on such occasions, always experiences a certain amount of trouble with her daughter, Lady Julia Firebrace. Lady Julia is a great favourite with all the male diners at Firebrace House—pleasant, unaffected, and chatty. Perhaps she is a trifle self-willed, and, undeniably, just in the slightest degree fast. However this may be, her ladyship always has to string her mantilla more than once over her shoulders, more than once to cough significantly, and more than once to hold up her gloved hand; for whether it be malice prepense, simple inadvertence, or a partiality for the mixed society of the dining-room, Lady Julia has a way of systematically ignoring her noble mother's inarticulate hints.

If there is one period in the day at which more than at another women are utterly and entirely supreme in their own chosen realm—that of the drawing-room—it is during that interval between their own departure and that of their lords and masters from the dining-room. Who shall presume to imagine, much less to report, the mystic female confidences that are then celebrated, the amount of gossip that is indulged in, the measure of scandal that is talked, the multitude of secret schemes that are then first projected? What mortal man is audacious enough to speculate upon the ruthless manner in which these angels of this sublunary world analyze the weak points of claret-

imbibing manhood in the dining-room below; upon the utterly heartless minutiæ of detail with which they dwell upon the faults, the character and career of the defenceless male; on the stupidity with which Jones comported himself at dinner; or upon the spurious brilliancy of the wit with which at this very moment Smith is congratulating himself on having charmed Lady Mary and her daughter? If we could only receive a full, true, and particular report of all that is said and done at these after-dinner female conferences, how would our eyes be opened? How should we not see the utter *bouleversement* of the supposed verdicts of women—what new insight into those most inscrutable mysteries of the female heart should we not receive! But the increase of our knowledge would not end here. We should see and hear far more than this. We should know what are the real feelings which Lady Clorinda entertains towards her darling friend Lady Jane; we should hear what is the way in which Mrs. Flam talks to Mrs. Ham about their common neighbour, whom they each profess so much to admire, Mrs. Faddle. We should have the opportunity of noticing the intense power which women possess of displaying their enmity and making themselves disagreeable to one another, without the exhibition of a hostile gesture or the utterance of an unpleasant word. We should be told of things which, even if we ever hear them, we hear only long after, and which would make us open-eyed with surprise—the true secret of Miss Montague's marriage with Frank

Playton: how it was that Lady Mary was induced to consent to her daughter's engagement with Bullion, and what was the history of the sudden disappearance and reappearance of her diamonds; why the Fitz Deficits have given up their house in town this summer; and what are the reasons for Mrs. Naggin's protracted absence from her husband and her residence with her parents in Shropshire. Will not some brave-hearted male so far emulate the example of Clodius as to disguise himself in feminine attire, and thus gaining access to the drawing-room during the half-hour after dinner, violate the rites of that mystic and sacred season? We should know how Lady Mildmay, that most soft-tongued and inveterate of elderly intriguers, manages to get hold of gushing little Mrs. Breezy, and to pump her systematically and successfully on those points connected with the Breezy *ménage* in general, and Mr. Breezy in particular, which she intends shall furnish her with her great scandal-subject for the next few days; how Miss Livore points out to her dear friend Miss Singleton that of course Mrs. Simper—sitting on the ottoman opposite—is very handsome; "but don't you think, dear"—yes, Miss Singleton does think—"and doesn't it seem to you that there is a curious look about her cheeks? and I must say, if her chignon is natural, the colour of her hair is very different in different parts of her head," and so on. Far be it from us to say aught of the dear gentle-hearted creatures that might sound critical or stern, but we have a shrewd suspicion that in the

lady's hour after dinner more envy, malice, hatred, and uncharitableness, veiled beneath sweet looks and couched in subtly suave forms of speech, goes on than during any other period of the day.

As for you—poor unoffending male that you are—when you come up into the drawing-room, after having submitted to the usual amount of boring downstairs, it is to find that the lady whom you had the pleasure of handing down to dinner and sitting next to, and in whose good graces you had installed yourself as you fancied so rapidly, is hopelessly lost to you for the rest of the evening. Fortunately the remnant that remains to be passed is not very long. You console yourself for your disappointment by talking scandal to the Countess of Firebrace herself. The Earl intersperses his political comments with light social badinage — a few pianoforte fireworks are discharged—your brougham is announced, and in the space of ten minutes you thank your stars that you are once more in the cozy smoking-room of the club.

CHAPTER V.

DRAWING-ROOM USAGES—*continued*, AND SOME HINTS FOR SOCIAL REFORM.

The question proposed: "Who regulate the Fashions?"—The Great problem of the leaders of Society—The principles and varieties of Social *Réunions* explained—Capacities of Luncheon—Luncheon *v.* Breakfast—Recommendations and characteristics of Luncheon—Suggestion of "Evenings": their special uses—The decline of "Evening Parties"—Croquet as an institution—Five o'clock Tea at Mrs. Belleville's.

WHO are the supreme arbiters of fashion? In what region supernal, terrestrian, or situated midway between heaven and earth, are we to find that omnipotent court which introduces, changes, abolishes wholly, the Protean modes of the transient seasons? In obedience to what mysterious yet all-powerful law is it that the taste of one lustrum becomes the abomination of the next; that robes which spread fascination in sixty-eight are viewed with aversion in sixty-nine; that our maidens and matrons on a sudden swell the circumference of their skirts to the dimensions of an inflated balloon, and then in the twinkling of an eye reef them in till they are shrunk and attenuated, even as a rat which has narrowly escaped the extreme perils of the deep? Why is it, and how is it, that the fair tenants of

Belgravian *salons* should rejoice as you look at them to-day in tresses neatly braided and pressed closely to the head, and that on the morrow they should surmount the region of the occiput with tresses piled à-la Pelion on Ossa, as if to scale the heavens themselves? How comes it, we wish to know, that the graceful curves of the—well, we believe dress-improver is the correct term—should yield without the slightest note of warning to the dromedary-like projections of skirts looped *en panier?* What is the reason that our drawing-rooms are now filled with feminine faces, light as the sunbeam, decked with locks of floating gold; now with countenances belonging to the order of the brunette, fringed with hair not auriferous but sombre in hue; and now again with *demoiselles* and *madames,* whose tresses have by some miraculous swift chemical process been changed to pre-Raphaelite red? In like manner, not to limit this same problem of metamorphosis of hue to the capillary adornments of the human head, on what principles are we to account for the vicissitudes that occur in the history of colours generally? Why are combinations once deemed the perfection of harmony now voted utter violations of the primary laws of æsthetics? Mauve, magenta, violet, —why should these each pass their brief hour of boastful display and then for a space disappear?

Only let us know where that sublime body which arranges all these and other analogous matters resides, and our curiosity would be content. Is the code of

fashion of the period drawn up by a select convention, in the same way that, according to the theories of one school of thinkers, language was the result of a general conference of mankind. Of what members is the body composed? Is the post hereditary, or is the representative chosen by the system of suffrages? Lastly, is this supreme power vested in the hands of those who make or those who wear? Do dressmakers and tailors, the artists in raiment, determine what mankind and womankind are to wear, and how they are to wear it, or does the final fiat issue from the mouths of those for whom the artists work? Or are all these theories wrong—all these suppositions chameleon-like and based in rottenness? And should we be right in conjecturing that the prerogative of decisive legislation rests, not with any corporate society of lawgivers, but with one presiding genius—that it is he or she, as the case may be, who, in the first place, irrevocably fixes for his or her fellows what is to be the fashion, the mode, the vogue?

But we may dismiss the speculation as too enigmatical, too difficult, too vast. We must be content to know things as they are, and in the order of succession in which they appear to us, without prying whence they are or why they are. It is enough for us, with our merely finite powers of comprehension, that we should realize the fact that such things as fashions exist—that periodically certain undeniable changes do sweep over the surface of popular taste—that inconstancy in this respect is the law of nature—without making a series of abortive efforts to

penetrate to the fountain head whence the *primum mobile*, the great cause of all these fluctuating phenomena, emanates.

We have been led into this digression from a wish that we entertain, not indeed actually to dictate any reform to the anonymous potentates of fashion, but merely to suggest to them, in a spirit of all-fitting humility, certain modifications on existing usages, not wholly unconnected with the drawing-room, that might in our opinion be reasonably made. As for any hints that we may have to throw out, it only remains for us to express a hope that they may be forwarded to what we must vaguely characterize as the proper quarter, seeing that it is absolutely beyond our ken specifically to indicate what that quarter is.

The great problem which the conductors of society and the leaders of fashion have to solve is, What are the various ways in which social intercourse is most conveniently to be secured—what are the modes most eligible, according to the rank and station of individual entertainers for exhibiting their hospitality to their friends, and for bringing those friends together on the ground of some common rendezvous? In this respect there has been discernible in English society during the last few years two influences; each distinct in kind, and each antagonistic to the other. On the one hand, as we shall presently see, we have sacrificed to a great extent those *réunions*, at one time so frequent in certain sections of society, eminently

friendly, devoid of strained magnificence and of frigid grandeur. On the other hand, by way of compensation, we have invented more than one new pretext for entertaining our friends, select or miscellaneous, in large numbers or small, and giving them opportunities of more intimate mutual converse than those afforded by the reception, the ball, or the dinner-party. If we have not the evening parties of a bygone age, have we not croquet parties, kettle-drums, not to mention chatty and private five o'clock teas? All these are institutions which we hail with gratitude and satisfaction. But is there any reason why we should rest and be thankful here, without endeavouring to proceed farther in the path of social reform? But is there nothing more to be done in this direction? Has human ingenuity exhausted itself on this point already? Is not the philosophy of society capable of receiving additional contributions as to methods, possible and reasonable, for the gathering together of acquaintance and friends in a quiet and friendly manner?

Let us commence by saying that we believe the meal of luncheon to be an opportunity susceptible of valuable development and material improvement. We very much question whether there is a period in the whole of the day devoted to the consumption of solids and fluids, more essentially pleasurable than the luncheon hour. It is luncheon only that unites in itself the precise proportions of *abandon* and grace which on such occasions as those to which we now refer are primarily to be desiderated. It is without

any of those peculiar drawbacks possessed by breakfast as a meal for meeting and for converse; it is also without that grave formality which renders a dinner party so laborious and often so spirit-chilling an enterprise. The breakfast hour, as we have already had occasion to point out in some remarks touching the internal organization of the Reform Club, is pre-eminently sacred to silent meditation and social reserve. It is an utter violation of the fundamental principles of human nature to appear to one's best advantage within a minute of the completion of one's toilette, full of the painful knowledge that one's letters—messengers of uncertain tidings, from the opening of which, especially if their envelopes are blue and their superscriptions clerkly in character, one instinctively revolts—face one side by side with one's roll. The whole temperament is unthawed; nor can the process of defrigeration commence till the mid-day sun has shot forth his beams. Socially speaking, breakfasts are and must be failures. The meal is one to be taken in strict privacy—in your own room, with the door carefully barred against all intruders. Thus only will you be able to extract from your tea the maximum of that soothing influence to which you naturally look as the great prophylactic against the trials and annoyances which will inevitably assail your soul in the course of the coming twelve hours; thus only can you indulge in the emollient accompaniment of the cigar, over which you will be able tranquilly to survey the situation and to elaborate

a satisfactory solution of the various problems and difficulties which beset the path of daily existence. Breakfasts *en famille*—for ninety-nine persons out of a hundred they are a mistake.

But at luncheon all this is different. The circumstances under which mankind meet each other are completely changed. There are none of those icily constraining influences at work which a few hours since caused the heart and the ideas of everyone to be to his neighbour as a sealed book; nothing of that natural stiffness, or at best, forced geniality which rendered breakfast, in spite of all efforts made at sprightliness or life, so dismal an affair. The sentiment of moral goose-skin has been shaken off. The edge of that nervous anguish as to what the day may bring, from which the sensitive temperament always suffers during the morning hours, has worn off. The world generally has got into its customary stride; your friends and neighbours have shaken themselves into their regular places; you yourself feel where you are; you have become on intimate terms with the situation, and are to a certain extent the master of it. Then there is the pleasant knowledge that certain tasks which hung heavily upon your conscience have been discharged, that a vexatious correspondence has been terminated, and that whether your efforts are crowned with success or not, you have done all you can to meet the exigences of the day. Very much the same thing holds good in the case of women as in the case of men. When at luncheon, your fair *vis-à-vis* has ceased

to be tormented with any harassing anxieties touching her appearance indissolubly incident to the matinal meal. She has shaken off all the traces of fatigue that may have then been visible in her as the results of Lady Tyghte-fytte's ball; has learned to suppress all the mortification, symptoms of which may have made themselves evident upon her a few hours since, at the unfavourable prospects of the matrimonial market, and has calmly instructed herself in her daily lesson of philosophy—that of taking things as they are, and making the best of them always. Then for her, as for you, if the scene is a country house, there has been the delicious stroll or ride in the park, the exquisitely scented morning breezes, the inspection of the pets, or any other of the countless occupations in which at such periods it is usual to indulge. If the venue is shifted to town, you have both of you had the canter in the Row, the chat over last night's dissipation with Miss Bellasys and Bob Kennedy, and have improved your tone, mental and physical, at least twenty per cent. by the process. We believe we are guilty of no exaggeration when we say that luncheon, in what is known as fashionable society, is the only meal in which women disdain artifice and put on nature. We are convinced that with the majority of women it is the one solid repast in the day which they permit themselves to enjoy, and at which they do not think it derogatory to their ethereal attributes to display and indulge a substantial appetite. The amount of cutlets and chicken, cold lamb and salad which fair crea-

tures, who at dinner can only play with a spoonful of soup, and toy with a vol-au-vent, are able to dispatch at luncheon is refreshing to witness.

Whether it be in the entertainment of our friends, or in the improvement of our species, the best guide that we can take is nature. Nature then having given us such plain and unmistakable hints, what more advisable than to act upon them? Why not seize upon the opportunities which luncheon affords, and develop them to the utmost extent? Why should not luncheon parties be permitted to take their place in the recognized list of friendly entertainments? They would supply just the required field for that modest species of hospitality which many persons look for in vain under the existing *régime*. Some safeguard against their abuse it would be necessary to erect. Above all things it would be absolutely imperative to guard against the possibility of their exaggeration into early dinners. It is indispensable that the hour at which they were given should be reasonably early—not later, we should suggest, than two, or at the outside half-past—that there should be no protracted sitting after the conclusion of the repast, in order that persons, to whom business or exercise subsequently was an object, should not sacrifice their afternoon. Possibly, and probably too, it would be found desirable that such parties should not be suffered numerically to swell to unwieldy dimensions, and that the maximum should be fixed at about a dozen. If luncheons of this description were once regarded as an institution, they

would speedily achieve a popularity. What more delightful than after a morning's business, or business combined with pleasure, or for the matter of that pleasure only, after two or three hours devoted to the labour of the desk, office, or chambers, to drop in upon those charming people the Sweets, for a quiet cutlet; or if the disciplined appetite rebel against anything so substantial, a biscuit and a glass of sherry? It will be said that the inroad thus made upon a busy man's day would be fatal. By no means. It must be distinctly understood that the meal is an open one, that a protracted attendance is not *de rigueur*, and that the guest is free to rise exactly when he pleases. Even to the most industrious and hard-brained of mortals a break in the day's proceedings is an absolute necessity. There must be an idle hour between breakfast and dinner, and when should this hour more aptly come than from two to three o'clock? Depend upon it that persons whose company you care for, and whose company is worth anything, are never to be seen to better advantage than at the season which we have indicated.

Nor is this the sole species of innovation in the theory and practice of entertainment that might according to our views be introduced with salutary effects. It was, if we are not mistaken, the Duke of Wellington who was in the habit of saying that amongst all his numerous acquaintances he did not know one at whose house he could casually drop in and ask for a cup of tea. This might have been and probably was an exaggeration, but it is an

exaggeration which contains more than a solitary grain of truth. We will assume you to be a social favourite, young, handsome, moderately opulent, a fair talker, and an unexceptionable partner in the ball-room. In these separate capacities you will be overwhelmed with invitations. At the present moment you probably have enough cards and triangular notes for balls, dinners, and what not else inscribed on pink paper, and redolent of delicate perfumes, to keep you hard at work for the next three weeks, to say nothing of covering every square inch of the walls of your chambers. Supposing, however, that you wished to devote an evening to relaxation of a less exhausting and more domestic character, what would you do then? You are a bachelor, and are not consequently—or ought not to be—the independent proprietor of your own Lares and Penates. It is most likely that you would find some difficulty in selecting any house to which you could repair for the purpose of realizing the praiseworthy tranquillity of your proposed enjoyment,—excepting, perhaps, to the mansion of some of your own kith or kin, or to that one, may be, in which you are regarded as a kind of matrimonial victim, decked up prettily with blue ribbons, and doomed shortly to be led to the altar of sacrifice. We have taken our dinner *menus*, and our modes from France: we might go a step farther, and imitate our lively neighbour the Gaul in one of his social usages, why should we not reproduce here on English soil the institution of the French *salons*? It must be distinctly understood that we are not referring to set

state receptions chillingly magnificent "at homes"; those we have in abundance already. Why should not persons who are desirous of their friends' company without being bored with the trouble of ordering a regular entertainment more frequently than is at present the case, hold "evenings"? Let it be understood amongst a circle of their acquaintances as large or as small as for their purpose they deem advisable, that on certain days of the week, between certain hours P.M., they will be happy to see those who care to drop into their drawing-room. As we have said, the area which such general invitations would cover might be narrowed or extended according to the taste of the giver. One thing is quite certain, only those who really wished to see you would avail themselves of the opportunity, and by implication only those whom you also wished to see. Incidentally there are also certain special advantages which the system would possess. We have no wish to speak coarsely or to wound in any way the feelings of the most sensitive of parents, but "evenings," such as those which we venture to suggest, would indubitably have the effect of brightening very considerably the prospects of marriageable young ladies. The great want felt by young men who, fresh from home, with all its agreeable reunions and pleasant placid society, are thrown upon the Sahara of the metropolis to make their way, is a house where they can look in during the evening, with no further ceremony than is implied in the wearing of a white tie and a dress coat. After all we are a domestic nation. Clubs do not

supply all the wants of our nature, and young men especially grow weary of the monotony of club society with marvellous rapidity. To them, these evenings, with all the pleasant unpretentious intercourse that they would supply, would be perfect godsends; and as investments to over-daughtered families they would pay far better than any number of concerts, balls, or dinner parties. English girls never are seen to greater advantage than in the tranquil atmosphere of domesticity. The hearts of English young men are never more open to receive the gentle shafts of love than when they view feminine nature under these conditions. It is a mistake to suppose that the surest bait for the matrimonial hook is a never-ending round of glittering ostentation, and that just as the mackerel is lured to its destruction by whatever is dazzling or bright, so the unattached male can only be fascinated by the glamour of ball-rooms and the splendour of wax-lights.

The English, says Mr. Disraeli, in some one of his novels, are a nation who, in their progress, have stopped short at comfort, and mistaken it for civilization. In much the same spirit it might be remarked that we are a people extremely apt to indulge a passion for social ostentation, and then to term it hospitality. It is this tendency which forms the real barrier to the reforms that we have here indicated in outline, though there are doubtless other circumstances which have contributed to the same result. Within the last few years the proportions of society have increased so enormously as almost to threaten

its entire disorganization. Visiting lists have swelled to dimensions that exceed all precedent. Persons who a few years since would have numbered their acquaintances by tens or by twenties, now count them by hundreds or by fifties. Under the old *régime* persons were enabled, by asking only a limited number of friends at a time, to give really social and pleasurable little parties. Two or three gatherings of twenty or so in the course of three or four months, were no extravagant tax upon the time or on the pockets of hosts; but now instead of two or three such re-unions twenty or thirty would scarcely suffice. The consequence is that, in London at any rate, these modestly conducted festivities have entirely died out. Grand receptions and state "at homes" have taken the place, and that amongst all ranks, of the parties of a bygone day. It is curious to note how simultaneous are the changes which sweep over the surface of society. Precisely the same thing that has occurred in England has occurred in France. There, across the Channel, we are told by the author of an interesting little pamphlet, entitled '*Notre Ennemi de Luxe*,' middle-class life has lost almost all that made it formerly so agreeable. There are none of those pleasant little dinners at which there used to be such an amount of genial merriment and sincere good humour, so much keen enjoyment, tempered withal by a graceful admixture of unceremonious courtesy. These re-unions have been increased, by an unwholesome process of forcing, to dimensions unnaturally monstrous: the result is we have

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"the demon of the state dinner, that offspring of luxury and pride." *Mutatis mutandis*, this description is entirely applicable to the metamorphosis which has asserted its presence in English society. There was, as we have hinted above, a form of entertainment at one time, and that not long ago, much in vogue amongst the professional classes—the "evening party," properly so called in contradistinction to the purely musical party on the one hand, and to the dancing party on the other. It was, if judiciously managed, if not too large, and if a fair amount of discretion had been exercised in the selection and blending together of guests, a reasonable agreeable manner of meeting your friends. You were asked for 8, and at 8.30 the great bulk of the company had arrived. The available rooms of your host's house were all of them thrown open, but there had been none of that painful dislocation of furniture which causes your household to reproduce the ancient state of chaos, during the few days that precede the set ball which once a season you are compelled, out of a regard for the proprieties, to give now. There was a good deal of light conversation, there was a little card-playing, not of too severe or business-like an order to be interrupted by the gentle babble of undisciplined talk; and then in another room there was music. If you wished to mix in the general tide of visitors you could join the main circle; if, on the other hand, you felt disposed to glide tranquilly away into the comparative quiet of the music-room, *solus cum solâ*, there was nothing to

prevent you, and you might whisper as many sweet inanities into the ear of the temporary possessor of your affections as you cared to do. A little later on in the evening a murmur went round the apartments that supper was waiting below—a supper light or solid in its character, according to the views which your entertainer held upon the capacities of the human digestion. Occasionally some buoyant spirit would suggest that the tables should be pulled aside in the drawing-room, and that there should be a carpet-dance, and so, in one way or other, a pleasant and sociable evening was pleasantly and sociably concluded.

But of this sort of thing we have scarcely anything now in London, and even in the country it is very rapidly disappearing. The influence of the modern Babylon is essentially centrifugal, and the remotest of provincial towns considers that its education is incomplete unless it assimilates itself as closely as may be to the great metropolitan model. The age with its pressure of levelling uniformity, has decided against the continuance of these re-unions, and they are practically abrogated accordingly. If people desire music, we have drawing-room crushes, and private or amateur concerts. You arrive rather late, and you are consigned to the region of the staircase for the evening. Lady Tyghtefytte always strains a room naturally calculated to hold sixty to the dimensions required for the contents of two or three hundreds. As for cards, they are played now, it is true, but there are no

evening parties, of the sort we have described, for their enjoyment as a pastime. In the ball-rooms of Bath and Cheltenham you will still find an apartment or so devoted to the special purpose of septuagenarian old maids and liverless Indian officers seriously settling down to the occupation of short whist while the young people dance. But in London men either play cards at their clubs, or else make up parties of themselves privately at their own houses or chambers. Round games have ceased to be in the way they once were a legitimate and recognized species of amusement at the evening party. As for conversation, there was probably never a time when it was more neglected as an art in the in-door gatherings of the period. At dinner-parties it lacks the fire of spontaneity; at receptions it becomes an impossibility; at balls it is limited to an isolated *tête-à-tête* chat in the intervals of the waltz.

But, as we have stated at the commencement of this chapter, we gladly confess that there is a reverse of the medal, and that if society is a loser in some respects by the destructive legislation of late years, it has also gained by certain compensatory results on the side of creation. *Intereunt multa et nascuntur multa vicissim.* The last few years have indeed witnessed innovations of so salutary and hopeful a character, that we by no means despair of witnessing the actual realization of those reforms which we have ventured to delineate above. If we have cut down the opportunities that once existed for the friendly

and familiar reunion of acquaintances within doors, we have certainly very much extended those outside. Here again we witness another instance of that curious dual influence, that ubiquitous antagonism of phenomena, "the eternal strife," of the weeping philosopher, which underlies all nature and all society. Artificial we undoubtedly are; that is the inseparable accident of an advanced civilization. But then does not this increased addiction of ours for gatherings which are held under no other canopy save that of the heavens, with no carpet beneath the feet save that of turf and moss which the herbage spreads, indicate something of that return to nature, which enthusiasts tell us is the sign of the rejuvenescence of the world?

The increased popularity of the flower-show and the promenade may be considered both of them as emblematic of the introduction of new methods of social intercourse and freedom of friendly meeting. But the miraculous spread of croquet as an institution throughout all classes of English society is in reality the most marked phenomenon of the age, and has, with infinitely more effect than either of the foregoing, supplied the want which was making itself felt. Whether the game be regarded with the heart-deep enthusiasm of the devotee, or with the lukewarm affection of incipient boredom is wholly a matter of indifference. If it is not engaged in as a pastime for which profound skill is necessary, it is at least enjoyable for its attractive accessories. In a word, it brings people

together, and that in a manner that necessitates a minimum of trouble and expense on the part of the entertainer, and banishes the constraining influences of ceremony from those who are entertained. Its charm is its catholicity. Given a lawn a very few yards square, a certain number of mallets, hoops, and balls, and the thing is as good as done. Here is an opportunity for the display of those qualities which constitutes social popularity attainable no where else. The scene is inspiriting, and its enlivening effects are rapidly communicated to the natures of those who revel in it. Gaiety of temperament becomes a second nature. The influence of the sunshine is contagious, and the ceaseless click of the croquet balls robs even the most timid of beings of the dread of hearing his own voice. Do you want flirtation? Croquet is its very apotheosis. The terms themselves are so charmingly ambiguous that it needs but the utterance of them in a slightly significant tone of voice to make more headway in this accomplishment than could be done in the whole course of an evening spent in a ball room. You may introduce an inexpressible amount of sentiment into the manner in which you help your fair partner through a hoop; or supposing you to be that partner yourself, an infinite degree of captivating vindictiveness into the manner in which you send your adversary's ball spinning across the green sward. Besides, is not the very phraseology employed in the game charmingly suggestive and piquantly significant? Judiciously managed, what a fund of felicitous allusion will

not the one word "rover" supply. Probably, too, there never was any better species of discipline introduced for the benefit of feminine nature. Croquet has its disappointments, and these to the fair combatant are more trying than she would care to own. Precisely the same effort which teaches her to disguise defeat in the mimic contest of croquet, will enable her also to conceal chagrin when the instruments she plays with are hearts, and the prize of victory, diamonds.

Among the institutions of the drawing-room, which are comparatively of recent date, a place of becoming prominence must be accorded to that known as five o'clock tea —an ordinance essentially feminine in its character and origin, but one which exercises in different ways considerable weight in the complicated economy of modern society. What the club smoking-room is to the ruder nature of man, that in a very great degree is the drawing-room to its natural tenants during the period that this repast—if, indeed, to so butterfly a refection can be applied so gross and material a name—is in course of celebration. Some one or other, we forget who, once characterized the love of tea as the distinguishing mark between the two sexes; and it is undeniable that woman never seems more womanly than when the Chinese beverage is in process of consumption at the season we have indicated.

Have you a *penchant* for sipping delicately-scented bohea out of exquisitely fragile and ethereally tiny cups some couple of hours before you dine? No? Then never

mind. Leave that part of the business to those to whom it is a second nature to do so, and wander up into a drawing-room well known to you, in the precincts of Mayfair, to which you have proved yourself sufficiently agreeable and useful to have the *entrée* at this pleasant hour, and witness the performance of the ceremony known as five o'clock tea. It is six by this time, but that does not affect the nomenclature. The young ladies of the establishment, the daughters of the house, have come in fresh from their ride, or elate with a comfortable pride of virtue at the consciousness of calls long owed duly performed at last. James has only this instant deposited in a convenient corner near the window, the fairy tray, with its cargo of equally fairy-like cups. The sun slants into the room, crimsoning his rays, ere they are cast upon the carpet, through the silken blinds that sway gently in the evening breeze. A subtle odour of perfumes, not oppressively fragrant as a few hours hence it may be, but fresh and revivifying, steals over your senses; and a delightful languor, the result of the mingled influences of a stroll up the Ladies' Mile, and a pleasing sense of all that is luxurious and refined around you, seems to weigh you down as you deposit the burden of your limbs on a lounge-chair which has sustained your weight more than once before now.

"I like five o'clock tea," is the comment of angel number one; "it is the only time in the day that you are free from bores."

You accept the compliment with a reasonable acknowledgment, and begin to feel one of the family already.

Presently, perhaps, a tall cousin from the Treasury, who professes an intense fondness for the non-inebriating cup, strolls in, bringing with him a budget of news. The tall cousin may or may not be to your liking. However, he does not materially interfere with your comfort, and you are still able in spite of his presence to keep up a running fire of small talk and confidential criticisms with your fair *vis-à-vis*. Are you fond of gossip, latest intelligence, scandal, or what not else? Now is the time to hear it. Now is the time to gain information which at any other hour in the day you might search and long for in vain. The Miss Bellevilles have seen crowds of people this afternoon. They can tell you exactly the state of the marriage market—who is the great catch of the season; whether Miss Ellesdee is in reality the great heiress that people suppose her to be; why it is that Captain Levanter and Mrs. Golightly are "cuts" now; and what is the true reason of the Flieaways going abroad. Meet these same now communicative young ladies at dinner, and they would be embodiments of discreet silence. The tall cousin from the Treasury has picked up some surprising anecdotes at Arthur's, and altogether you have not been in Mrs. Belleville's drawing-room half-an-hour before you have learnt about twice as much of one kind and another as all the evening papers for the next fortnight would tell you. How quickly does the time fly! Would it not be possible

just to try that new song over once—only once? Or cannot you be prevailed upon to give mamma the ludicrous account of the dinner which you had a day or two ago at the Blogslys? And who was that *débutante* with whom you danced last night? Pretty, did you think her? Well, she might be. And of course you are going to the Comtesse de la Fontaine's garden party at Twickenham on Thursday? And——

"My dear Clara," interposes Mrs. Belleville, taking out her watch, "have you any idea what the time is? Past seven now, and we dine in Grosvenor Place at eight?"

Which remark terminates the conversation and five o'clock tea simultaneously.

As you wend your way into St. James's Street, the tall cousin who is with you remarks that "By gad, about the only hour in the day when women don't think it bad form to be their real selves" is during the interval between the termination of their afternoon exercise and the announcement that it is time to dress for dinner. Mentally you supplement this comment with the remark that the season is a perilous one for the susceptible celibate; but in spite of the danger, the invention of five o'clock tea was undeniably a happy thought.

There are five o'clock teas, and five o'clock teas. As for one order, we have seen that they are less of a refection than a pleasing pretext for the interchange of chat. Of the other, the celebrants of which are purely of the fair

sex, politeness prohibits us from saying more than that a knowledge of the satisfying solids dispatched by way of accompaniment to the soothing beverage would somewhat lessen the perplexity evinced by young Fitz Simple at seeing his *vis-à-vis* at dinner, Miss Languish, unable to do more than scarcely sip a spoonful of soup, and barely nibble a square inch of jelly, some two hours subsequently, and prevent him from entertaining for a moment the notion that fashionable young ladies need nothing more than a breath of air for their diet.

CHAPTER VI.

POLITICAL DRAWING-ROOMS.

The social side of Politics — Wives and Election Petitions — Feminine Canvassers — The bribe of smiles — The Drawing-room as a political forcing-ground — Mr. Algernon Fluker — Lady Alma Fawcer's Wednesday Evenings — Mr. Algernon Flutter — Mr. A. Vervain — The Hon. Lionel Fitz Maurice — Mr. Sidney Tricalle — Miss Bulteel's Evenings — Silence for Mr. Turnbull — Sir John Drowzy's Drawing-room before the Election — Début of Mr. Finespun Rattle — The Countess of Highsteppe's Drawing-room.

That the connection of the drawing-room with politics, and that the relations occupied by the drawing-room's gentle sovereigns to the conduct of those affairs with which the welfare of the state is bound up, have materially changed in the course of the last few years, we have shown at sufficient length in the preceding chapter. It is not, however, for that reason to be supposed that women generally have renounced all part and parcel of their interest in public matters, or that they fail to exercise a very considerable weight, now and again, upon the complex arts of political strategy. If the days have gone by when a Lady St. Julians could hope to win some half-dozen additional votes for the Cabinet of which her lord and master was a member, by periodically inviting a few Manchester manufacturers' wives to her Wednesday Evenings; if the gradual

assertion of social equality within a certain area has abolished the existence of this species of patronage, it is by no means to be supposed that the secret political history of the day, once it could be known, would fail to disclose the fact that a mysterious feminine agency is often at the bottom of much for which we are unable to assign any satisfactory reason, and that feminine wire-pulling is in one way as much of a fact as it ever was.

The real difference in the connection between politics and the drawing-room as it exists now, and as it existed some years since, is that the motive which usually induces feminine interference in such matters has come to be in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred purely and entirely social. Women are perfect adepts in the art of fighting their battles with each other, not *in propriâ personâ*, but by the employment of some convenient representative. It is not long since we were experiencing the convulsive throes of a general election; it is only a very little while since we were in the heat and fury of the petitions which that election involved. A true, minute, and an accurate account of the *primum mobile* of a vast number of these would, we may pretty confidently assert, supply an excellent illustration of the kind and weight of the influence which the wives of our senators may exercise upon the current of our political life. What induced Stuckuppe to persevere in his altogether hopeless petition against Fluker? Why did he spend so much money in the absurdly futile attempt to prove an election invalid which

was notoriously free both from corruption and intimidation? Go to Mr. Flowett, in Guelph Street, and he will tell you why. Mrs. Stuckuppe has conceived a hostile spirit of rivalry towards Mrs. Fluker. Mrs. Fluker, in her opinion, has held her head far too high ever since her husband was returned for Mudborough, and has given herself enough airs for a Countess, to say nothing of what becomes the wife of a plain Commoner. To Mrs. Stuckuppe, the only conceivable object of a seat in Parliament is the accession of social dignity which it confers upon its possessor. Hence she hates Mrs. Fluker accordingly. Ever since the election, with all its nuisance and discomfort, was over, and Fluker was beaten by Stuckuppe by a majority of twenty, that unhappy man has scarcely been allowed ten consecutive minutes of peace by his energetic helpmeet. That Mr. Fluker only managed to win the seat by the exercise of the vilest arts of venality and corruption, that it merely requires the exposure of these to oust him from his newly gained pinnacle of prestige in a moment, and that Mr. Stuckuppe is a man singularly deficient in public spirit unless he commences to take the requisite steps for effecting the consummation without further delay—these are truths, real or supposed, with which she fails not night and day to assail the long-suffering ears of her husband. At last, for the sake of securing some tranquillity of existence, Stuckuppe consents to take the requisite step, and Fluker's seat is petitioned against. Mrs. Stuckuppe is in a state of ecstacy; the battle is as

good as won, and Mrs. Stuckuppe begins already mentally to compose an appropriate congratulatory ode in honour of her victory. Of course the result is what every one knew it would be. Fluker's seat is perfectly safe, and Stuckuppe has actually thrown away his money. This is a typical instance: we should like to know very much in what precise number of the recent election petitions there was not in some way or another a lady in the case? We regret to find ourselves bringing forward so little flattering a proposition, but in the majority of cases it is feminine jealousy rather than public spirit which awakes the keen political instincts of woman. We have 'The Secrets of a Telegraph Office,' would it not be possible also to have the secrets of the Election Petitions? Could not the illustrious Mr. Flowett, of Guelph Street, whom we have already had occasion to mention in these volumes, be induced in his omniscience to essay the enterprise?

Just as Mrs. Stuckuppe was a zealous promoter of the election petition precisely in proportion to her animosity against Mrs. Fluker, so we may assume it as an axiom that the extreme of feminine energy in political matters is seldom or never elicited save when there is some such motive as this to add zest and piquancy to the strife. Woman matched merely against man—the contest would be not only unequal, but it would lack vitality. When woman meets woman, then it is that the tug of war arrives. When it is known that on either side the two conflicting colours in the Mudborough Election have each

of them their supply of feminine directing agency, and that the struggle at the poll will but be symbolical of the warfare waged between two opposing sets of feminine forces, then it is that wives, sisters, and mothers exhibit to the full the keenness of their political instinct. The return of a member for the borough simply resolves itself into a trial of social strength, and in proportion as this attribute is possessed on either side in pretty nearly equal quantities, will be the fierceness and protraction of the fight. Then shall you see rival barouches roll down the streets of Mudborough, while the fair occupants of either vie with each other in the sweetness of the glances that they bestow on the passers-by on either side, and in the air of superb unconsciousness with which they pass the neighbouring carriage. Then it is that these presiding goddesses of the fray shrink not from spending long days in prosecuting the canvass of their side, that they are indefatigable in the succession of visits which they pay to cottage after cottage, and that if you—a natural sense of politeness having induced you to place yourself at the disposal of the fair electioneerer—venture to hint that enough has been done for one day, you are looked upon as a very poor-spirited creature indeed. No canvass could be more effective or more deadly to the opposite party than this. Bribery and corruption are not only to be effected by the interchange of certain pieces of the coin of the realm; a vote may be and often is bought by the bright smile of the fair face; and Hodge, the ploughman, as he

sits in his hovel, his only companion the old crone opposite who is his wife, vows that he would never go against any one in whom Miss Alice, who brought the sunshine into his cot, took an interest. Given anything like an equal distribution of political strength, and the victory will assuredly be on that side which can count the acquisition of feminine canvassing and support. Did not our friend Mr. Nugans Hahah, on his rejection for Rowington at the last general election, gracefully declare, when he addressed the electors subsequently, that victory would have been a moral impossibility for him, seeing that the two gentlemen who had been successful possessed such incomparable allies in the persons of their very charming wives?

With all these plain facts of social history before us, to say nothing of the claims which have been advanced for "the suppressed sex" by Miss Lydia Becker, and the whole contingent of the Female Emancipation Society, it is unnecessary to adduce further proof that feminine interest and activity in matters political are not dead yet. Nor is the significance of the phenomenon abated in any degree by what we have ventured to allege as in ordinary cases its prime mainspring and cause. The existence of political drawing-rooms is merely a deduction from these facts. A drawing-room is for all practical purposes a collection of feminine occupants, and the group has no meaning save when viewed in reference to the various individuals composing it. A very distinct and intelligible

function in modern social and political life do these drawing-rooms fulfil. Political proselytism they affect merely incidentally to accomplish. Their main purpose, as their main result, is the more compact union, the more effective welding together of the different component sections of one and the same political party, the resuscitation of the fire of political enthusiasm whenever it seems to flag, by the application of those arts which it comes within their peculiar province to administer. When Mr. Flutter first made his *début* on the floor of St. Stephen's, he was full of as high ambition as could inspire the breast of youth. He had embraced Parliament as a profession, and he was determined to achieve something great on the shortest possible notice. "The history of heroism is the history of youth," and Mr. Algernon Flutter was but twenty-one years old. There is something in the Westminster atmosphere—probably it is connected with the fogs and miasma which perceptibly or imperceptibly are always rising from the river—marvellously chilling to the warm enthusiasm of the hopeful. The air seems to have the effect of a wet blanket upon the great expectations and high hopes of the sanguine aspirant after political fame. Everything is so thoroughly impregnated with the influence of a levelling official routine, that there is almost no place at all for the political idiosyncrasies of native genius. Five out of every seven young men who enter the House of Commons do so with a firm intention and resolute endeavour to leave their mark upon that august representative assemblage. Then

comes the trial. For the first time in their life they are on their legs before the most critical audience in the world; for the first time in their life they hear the unwonted sound of their own voice addressing a compact assemblage. They experience a tremulous sensation in the region of their knees; their voice sticks in their throats; their eyeballs are like burning globes of fire; a universal dimness covers everything; and they would fain entreat the boards beneath them to disclose a yawning gulph and swallow them up whole within its friendly abyss. Presently, after a few desperate and abortive efforts, power of utterance comes — not so the faculty of memory. They have forgotten everything—all the hits which were to be so telling, the sparkling epigram which was to rivet and crystallize the attention of the House, the concealed sneer with which an adversary was to be silenced or an interruption suppressed, all those gestures which Quintilian pronounced to be the beginning, middle, and end of oratory; all those marvellously swift transitions from grave to gay, from sportive to severe, from solemn appeal to frothy satire. They are able merely to stutter forth a few disjointed sentences—bald, rough, and wholly irrelevant to the point at issue. With huge beads of perspiration on their brow, and a dismal conviction that their opportunity has come, that they have missed it, and that it will not return, they sit down. They have essayed active political life, and have failed. Henceforth they limit their aspirations to a periodical attendance at com-

mittees, going into the lobby with their party, never missing a division of importance, and laying on the table every petition which the malcontents of their constituency may take it into their heads to present to Parliament. A life of boundless ambition is realized in fact by a career of inglorious industry; the senatorial Pegasus has become the House of Commons' hack, and the voice which was to make empires quake from their foundations, and hurl ministries from power, if it occasionally asks a business question, or proposes a local road bill, thinks it has done its duty and may enjoy its rest.

Now it is exceedingly likely that our friend Algernon Flutter would have subsided into this condition of blighted ambition and ignominious acquiescence were it not for the placid encouragement and genial influences of Lady Alma Fawcer's drawing-room. Lady Alma, whose husband, plain Mr. Fawcer, is an ordinary plodding member of the House of Commons, has a decided *penchant* for budding senators. She likes to heal the wounds which the world inflicts upon their self-love, and to apply the balm of her solace to the frustration of their hopes. Go into Lady Fawcer's drawing-room any Wednesday you like during the season about six o'clock, and you will be sure to meet one of those political *protégés* of her ladyship. If you want to hear political gossip, the little drawing-room in Park Street is more fertile in that commodity than any number of smoking-rooms and clubs. Lady Fawcer's family are all political. Her father, the Earl of Diehard, was one of

the first of the titled champions of free trade, and though somewhat aged now is keen politician enough still. Her brother, after obtaining an Oriel fellowship, went into Parliament, and belongs to that clique of politicians who take their stand upon a doctrine known as intellectual liberalism. As for the principles of Lady Alma herself, she is something of an Eclectic; in other words, she is considered dangerously latitudinarian by those who embrace the political faith in which her family believe, and dangerously seductive by persons whose politics are different from those which she herself professes. Lady Alma has an idea that the young statesmen of the day do not receive a sufficient measure of encouragement at the hands of the leaders of parties. The Liberals she considers are chillingly indifferent to the rising talent which their ranks may disclose, and the Conservatives are contemptuously patronizing. Mr. Fawcer's wife has therefore applied herself to the task of properly adjusting matters, and of discharging those duties which are systematically passed by and ignored in the quarters in which they ought to be fulfilled. Lady Alma's dinner parties and small receptions —she never throngs her *salons* with one inconveniently promiscuous multitude—enjoy a high reputation of their own, for Lady Alma has plenty of tact, and whatever she takes in hand is sure to go off well. Then the young senator, whom she has been good enough to take up, always knows when he may call in Park Street with the chance, if not the certainty, of enjoying a *tête-à-tête* conver-

sation, and of receiving that compound of encouragement and admonition which when administered by a pretty woman is so pleasing a moral dose. It is said in certain political circles, that Lady Alma's drawing-room is worth two or three new recruits a-year to the side which can count her as an ally, and there is but little doubt that the influence which she oftentimes contrives to exert, though profoundly unobtrusive and subtle, does win an occasional recruit to the Liberal ranks. For her part, she will tell the young M.P. whom she is bent on entrapping with her silken wiles, she does not care much for party; what she does admire is political ability. In these days, softly insinuates her ladyship, the only difference which there really is between parties is one between names; and then she playfully proceeds to cross-question her victim in such a way that the process once terminated, he is utterly unable to say whether he belongs to the ranks of the government supporters or ought to take his place among the rank and file of the opposition, for Lady Alma lays it down as a maxim for her conduct in these matters that confusion is the first step to conquest.

To revert, however, to our friend Algernon Flutter. When this gentleman first found himself in the condition of dejection and disappointment which we have described as the initiatory experience of the young and ambitious M.P., destiny kindly threw him in the way of Lady Alma. Her ladyship, with a felicitous quickness of insight, at once discerned the state of the case. She plied him with

restoratives in the shape of judicious adulation, and after a course of a very few conversations with her, Mr. Flutter rapidly commenced to pluck up his fallen spirits and to discover a foeman worthy of his steel. The result is that at the present time Algernon Flutter is universally admitted to be one of the most promising of the younger members.

As we have said, her Wednesday Evenings are the crowning triumph of Lady Alma's position. All that is promising in the rising political talent of the day is usually to be seen in her drawing-room then. There are young men from both sides—unbending young Tories and red-hot young Radicals; those who can never moot a single subject of political discussion without endeavouring first to reduce it to a basis of pure reason, and those who have imbibed with their mothers' milk the good old lesson that the aristocracy are the natural leaders of the lower orders. That young gentleman, Mr. Arthur Vervain, whom you see yonder, and whose age may be some seven-and-twenty summers, was returned at the last election for a certain north of England borough. He has entered political life with a will, and has determined to bide his time before he attempts to make a *coup*. He comes of a Conservative stock, but by dint of much meditation on the present aspect of society, and the generally unsatisfactory condition of affairs, has reduced his own political sentiments to a tint so entirely neutral and colourless as to be swayed by any momentum of conviction on whatever side it may be. When he got in for Dragglewell-on-Meare,

he was not required to say much as to the specific opinions which he entertained, save that he was on most matters a Liberal Conservative, or a Conservative Liberal, whichever the case may be. He is supposed to be in a fair way to achieve a reputation on social questions, and the interest which he takes in the status of the labouring classes combined with certain local influences hereditary in his family, was the real thing which returned him for Dragglewell. Mr. Arthur Vervain is one of Lady Alma's most hopeful pupils. Anything may be done with him, it is her opinion, if only he is properly managed: and truth to speak, Mr. Vervain in the hands of her ladyship is very much what the moist clay is to the potter's wheel.

There are several more young men of greater or less political notoriety, members actual or aspirant of the House of Commons, with a fair sprinkling of others who seek not for any place in St. Stephen's at all, present at Lady Alma Fawcer's to-night. That gentleman whom you may see yonder lounging against the mantel-piece, is none other than the Hon. Lionel Fitz Maurice, a very highly-cultivated specimen indeed of the new rose-water Radical. At this present moment he is engaged, to quote an expression of Albert Smith's, "in making thin remarks through a ragged moustache." His manner is intensely supercilious and odiously affected. From the tone which he adopts, or the sentiments which he utters, you might suppose that his one object was to compress a maximum

of disagreeableness into a minimum of words and of time. If you presume to enounce any particular opinion on any conceivable subject, he will at once contradict you in a way which is calculated to convey to you the idea that while he despises you personally, he is not going to enlighten your ignorance. How did the Hon. Lionel contrive to achieve this insolence of demeanour? The fact is, his University successes have fairly turned his head. He won a first-class and a fellowship in that college which arrogates to itself a monopoly of Oxford culture. He is unable to shake off the manners with which the set he used there to associate have imbued him; he measures everything by the narrow standard of the schools, and has started in life with the deep-seated conviction that a knowledge of one or two of the Aristotelian treatises is a guarantee of infallibility on any matter on which he may be required to pronounce an opinion. Is he at present doing anything? Nothing whatever. Mr. Fitz Maurice will tell you he has an unutterable loathing for all modern professions. Suggest to him that he should write, and he will remark to you that fools only blurt out their ideas, but that wise men keep them to themselves. Will he ever go into public life? Of course he will immediately he gets the chance. Are you not able at once to judge from Mr. Fitz Maurice's attitude that his contempt is affectation, and that he denounces the grapes as sour merely because they are beyond his reach? What else do you suppose is portended by the indefatigable manner

in which the Hon. Lionel thrusts himself forward on every possible occasion; now figuring on this Radical Committee, now on that; now conspiring with a magnanimous band whose *raison d'être* is the vexatious persecution of a colonial ex-governor; and now subscribing small sums out of his pocket to secure the return of some exceedingly atheistical artizan for some borough in which a vacancy may occur? Trust him, the Hon. Lionel Fitz Maurice would give his eyes and all else that he possesses to fill a portion even of that space in the public eye which Mr. Algernon Flutter does.

Let us pass on to Mr. Sidney Trialle. This gentleman, who is a regular attendant at Lady Alma's evenings, is not in Parliament, nor does he even seek to be. But for all that he is a keen politician, though to describe him as a politician is merely to mention one of the many *rôles* in which he periodically appears. The position which Mr. Trialle aims at occupying in the world is that of an accomplished master of all modern arts and a considerable number of modern sciences. Politician, artist, dramatist, *littérateur*, and poet—he would combine the attributes of each of these callings in himself. In politics he is at once critical and creative. He will pull to pieces at a minute's notice any possible scheme that any possible minister could devise for, say, the pacification and amelioration of Ireland, and will in turn rear up with surprising rapidity a beautifully impossible fabric of reform of his own invention. He is great at detail, he is a perfect glutton at figures;

but then his detail is generally inaccurate, his figures always are. Nothing pleases him more than to button-hole some member of Parliament, or some journalist, and to make him sit at his feet, even as Paul did at the feet of Gamaliel, while he treats him to a modest disquisition on the condition of the world in general and of England in particular, on the absurdity of the errors into which our public men are every day falling, and to the only one panacea—a panacea it is needless to say of his own excogitation—which can cure it all. Sidney Trievalle, with his endless prosing and interminable exhortations, reminds one, in fact, of the French minister who, before he could go into some matter of primary importance with a friend who had travelled miles to see him, said, "Excuse me, pray give me one little quarter of an hour to explain to you the general state of Europe." At this present moment he is endeavouring to convert our friend Flutter to the views which he holds as to the only way in which constitutional government in England is to be rendered a fact. A minute more, and—Flutter fairly nauseated with the redundancy of his precepts—he will be breaking a lance with the Hon. Lionel, or attempting to instruct the hon. member for Dragglewell on sundry subjects of sanitary and social reform. Meanwhile Lady Alma reigns supreme, as the central attraction of the evening. Not unnoticed by her are the desperately didactic efforts of Mr. Sidney Trievalle. Her ladyship, in truth, plays the hostess to perfection. She seems to be ubiquitous and omniscient.

Just at the exact moment when the arguments of any of her *protégés* are acquiring a warmth which threatens to exceed discretion, at the precise instant when the persistency of Mr. Trialle is rapidly developing into boredom, at the identical point when satiety of disquisition is becoming *ennui*, her ladyship, a veritable *Dea ex machinâ*, intervenes; the conversation is fairly broken, and the restoration of perfect harmony is signalled by her opportune presence. Lady Alma Fawcer understands, as well as anyone can understand, that amongst the functions of hostess is the task of blending together in symmetrical union various types of human character, by an art whose process is unseen and whose results alone are felt, even as the cunning manipulator of silks or worsteds of multitudinous hue produces from the most perplexing varieties of tints an impressive unity of effect.

Let us say adieu to the minor celebrities of her ladyship's *salon* in Park Street, and pass on to a different species of political drawing-room. We are in the mansion of a certain elderly maiden lady, Miss Bulteel, we will call her resident say in Guelph Place. The conspicuous feature of Lady Alma's drawing-room was the absence of what may be called the leonine element. There was no one there whom you could specially select as the hero of the evening. The company was selected and conducted on the purely democratic principle. There was no central constellation, and one star differed not from another star in glory. But at Miss Bulteel's this order of things is

precisely reversed. The idea of this lady is to catch some very great political lion, enthrone him for the evening to the exclusion of every one else, and to request the remainder of her guests to gaze and listen in mute admiration the while. Her acquaintance is sufficiently extensive: in fact, not to know Miss Bulteel is to argue yourself unknown, and not to receive an occasional card for her evenings is an absence of attention which society is not slow to note. You may say they bore you; very possibly, but a modicum of boredom is the inseparable accident of a systematic preservation of *ton*. To-night Miss Bulteel has contrived to catch a very big political lion indeed, and very loudly and steadily he is roaring. Silence, if you please; the animal likes to hear his own voice to the exclusion of that of every one else. If you venture to interpolate a comment, *à propos* of some monstrous misstatement, some glib sophistry in utter violation of the simplest rules of logic propounded by this gentleman *ore rotundo*, you are at once met with an indignant "hush" from your next-door neighbour, just as you would be if you were ill-bred enough to indulge in a loud guffaw while Nilsson was in the middle of one of her exquisite solos. There the giant stands, one of his hands resting on a rosewood table of ebony shape, which you would fancy he mistakes for the solid piece of oak furniture that fortunately separates Mr. Disraeli and Mr. Gladstone from each other in the House of Commons, the other now lifted high in mid-air, and now dropping smitten

with the paralysis of rhetoric, like a sledge-hammer, by his side. Giant we said, but the term must be understood metaphorically rather than literally; for in point of fact the stature of the Right Hon. John —— —well, as this is a strictly anonymous publication, let us borrow a hint from Mr. Trollope and say, John Turnbull—is somewhat limited in its proportions. If, however, he is without length, he is not void of breadth. Those brawny shoulders, that pendant jowl, the voice slightly husky in its accidents—the said huskiness being caused, if rumour is to be believed, by an undue consumption of nicotine—the nervous Saxon style, the admirably selected phrases, the impressiveness of the harangue—intelligent reader, if you have any knowledge whatever of the House of Commons and its celebrities, have you not seen all these before, and seen them displayed by the nervous rhetorician of the Treasury Bench, whom they called erewhile the tribune of the people? As for ourselves, our admiration for the oratorical powers of Mr. Turnbull is intense. In our own opinion he is the one and only speaker in the House of Commons who at all adequately realizes our idea of the Demosthenic type. The only thing is that we emphatically object to this confusion of times and places. What is all very well in the House is entirely out of order in a Belgravian *salon*. The substantial solids which form highly desirable ingredients of meals that come later in the day are altogether out of place at breakfast. In the same way ponderous parliamentary declamation is

deplorably *mal à propos* in the drawing-room. Elsewhere in this treatise we have had occasion to make sundry remarks on the art of talk as it is studied and professed at the present day. We have here cited an instance which notoriously violates all accepted usages. We would now place the question fairly before our readers, whether bright flashes of intense brilliancy are not purchased at far too high a price, when they involve the arrogant conversational monopoly to the reboant strains of which Miss Bulteel's drawing-room resounds. In consideration of her opulence and position, this agreeable old lady is allowed a latitude of action which would be denied to any one else. Supposing smaller people were to adopt the *rationale* of her *salons* as a precedent, and invite the orators of their own particular set to hold forth as Mr. Turnbull holds forth now, should we not discharge upon them the whole armoury of our social criticism, and should we not pride ourselves on the felicity of the application, when we informed them, as we certainly should inform them, that the scenes to which Mr. Dickens has introduced us, and in which the unctuous Chadband plays so prominent a part, were but being enacted over again in their own drawing-rooms; and that if the topic of their Chadband's discourse was social or political, the *matériel* of the refreshments offered somewhat more *recherché* than muffins and shrimps, these were insignificant differences, and that the principle of the thing—we are always great on principle in such cases—was the same?

Certain drawing-rooms there are which, though, in their normal condition, by no means of a political order, assume upon special occasions a most emphatically political air. For instance, the drawing-room at Sleepington Grange does not in an ordinary way impress you as being a place where you are likely to meet with many parliamentary celebrities, or hear much keen discussion on the position of parties or the balance of power. Still, for all that, Sir John Drowzy considers himself the head of the Conservative party in East Downshire. He represented the division once in Parliament, but he did not essay the honour again: now he contents himself with having the main voice in the selection of the Tory candidate. If you had been at Sleepington shortly before the last general election you would have seen the whole house animated by an unwonted degree of political interest; for Mr. Flowett had just sent down from London Mr. Finespun Rattle, one of the most rising young men of the day, as the Tory champion, and Mr. Finespun Rattle was Sir John Drowzy's guest.

Mr. Finespun Rattle, though accounted, as we have said, a clever young man, was plausible rather than profound. It must be confessed that on the occasion of his first dinner at Sleepington Grange he felt somewhat disconcerted. With the more salient articles in the creed of the great political party which he represented our friend Finespun was of course acquainted. But he had his weak points; and his weak points consisted in a singularly

shallow intimacy with details, and an almost entire ignorance of local matters; and, as Mr. Rattle soon discovered, the constituency of East Downshire were great people for insisting on both. It was discomfiting enough for Finespun to be bored at the dinner-table with a whole series of questions proposed to him, on the subject of the game laws, the inspection of sea fisheries, and the position of tanneries—matters on which our friend knew little and cared less. It was disappointing to him to find that whenever he tried to divert the theme of conversation with his next-door neighbour, Sir Peregrine Bovinus, to some more general topic, the compromise was invariably refused, and he was brought back to the original topic. "Imperial politics may be all very well in their place," said Sir Peregrine, "but we must remember that East Downshire is not the Empire."

However, when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room, Mr. Rattle congratulated himself on having got fairly clear of all this cross-questioning. He was doomed to disappointment. No sooner had he run the gauntlet of the piano than he was fastened upon by Mrs. Honoria Hortatrix, a tremendous she-Conservative, and a politician of a very severe order. She assured Mr. Rattle that the one thing of vital importance was to pledge himself to take steps which should reform the Sunday-schools in East Loamshire, and abolish the Dissenters. "Dissent," added Mrs Hortatrix, "is the social evil of Downshire. Do you know, Mr. Rattle, I have a

little theory of my own which will account for the presence of this objectionable spiritual phenomenon? Downshire is, if I may be allowed to say so, abominably ill-drained. Ah, that reminds me, Mr. Rattle, you must see to our drainage, you know, when we return you to Parliament. Now the effluvia of bad drainage occasion fanaticism and madness, and a whole host of delusions; in Downshire these delusions assume the form of spiritual dissent. That is my view, Mr. Rattle. Do you not think it is irrefutably complete? Of course Finespun could only compliment his fair informant upon the consummate ingenuity and the philosophical profundity of her rationale of religious heterodoxy at Loamshire; though, as he had for his *vis-à-vis* at dinner the gentleman who was rector of the place for the representation of which he was now a candidate, it must be confessed that he entertained his own views on the matter; for the Rev. Rufus Fuddleton scarcely gave him the impression of a man who was calculated to exercise a strong religious influence over, or to awaken any very deep feelings in, a hard-hearted and stiff-necked generation. Perhaps this impression may have been right; Mr. Fuddleton always maintaining that he had done his duty by his country, his parish, and his Creator, if he managed to preach once a Sunday a short slumberous sermon, and contrived to dine once a fortnight with Sir John Drowzy. Then there were the two Miss Drowzys—Mr. Rattle had taken the eldest down to dinner—who were both sentimentally political. Of course Mr. Rattle would be suc-

cessful. And here Miss Drowzy, senior—who, be it mentioned, had just completed her seventh unsuccessful annual campaign in the *salons* and ball-rooms of London—looked into Finespun's face with eyes which seemed to say, "Will you not have my help!" As for Miss Drowzy, junior, she could not imagine how any person who had any regard for what was right could fail to be a Conservative. Would Mr. Rattle tell her whether she was right in believing that Mr. Gladstone and his party wished to bring in a bill to burn all the churches and rob all the squires throughout the kingdom? And so on *ad infinitum*. The political drawing-rooms, which are simply used for the purpose of trotting out candidates, are all of them strangely monotonous.

One more instance and we have done. The political drawing-room of what we may call the grand style is very nearly extinct—the *salon* of the statesman, whose mistress is no mere *dilettante* patroness of the Lady Alma Fawcer type, but in her way a veritable political queen. The death of Lady Palmerston may be said to have marked the close of a social dynasty. One such drawing-room, however, there is, and it rises to our memory at this present moment—the drawing-room of the Countess Highsteppe, who married the Right Hon. Mr. Marmaduke Weatherville, a gentleman who has already attained distination as a politician, and who is generally regarded as certain to be eventually appointed Viceroy of Ireland. In the Countess of Highsteppe's drawing-room you will

meet with more political celebrities than you could in the same amount of space anywhere else, for her ladyship is universally admitted to be a social leader and a fashionable star. There is something almost royal in her air, and there is a dignified pride in her movement which seems expressive of the consciousness of universal proprietorship. His marriage with Lady Highsteppe has no doubt made Mr. Weatherville what he is. This gentleman is undoubtedly by nature intelligent and plodding, but it is extremely questionable whether he would have compassed a seat in the Cabinet, or have before him the brilliant future which is universally admitted to await him. Yes, Lady Highsteppe is one of the most ambitious women in London, but she is qualified to achieve her ambition, and when her husband is promoted to the honours of the Vice-regal Lodge, it may safely be predicted that the Countess Highsteppe will take very good care to be Vice-queen.

CHAPTER VII.

INTELLECTUAL DRAWING-ROOMS AND DRAWING-ROOM LIONS.

Mind, the fashion — Mr. Nous Áphthartos — Holland House yesterday and to-day—Where really brilliant talk is to be found — Eglington Conyers — The Holland House of the past perpetuated in Lady Tynnefoile's Drawing-room — Lady Tynnefoile — Her principles, caprices, and ambitions — Her evenings — Mr. Tennore — Miss Pert — Mr. J. Jay — Reminiscences of Lamb's evenings in the Temple — Mr. Winterton Worksop's Sunday evenings — Miss Self — The Play read — Miss Dallwyn — Mr. Dogma — Tom Easy's Friday nights — Literary Drawing-room chit chat.

At present intellect may be considered a distinctly fashionable commodity. Its possessors are, in fact, so far as the drawing-room is concerned, rather the rage than otherwise. What the worship of Byron was to the drawing-room of forty years ago, that the adoration of mind, pure and simple,—mind, as a possession and glory by itself, irrespective of the particular development or expression which it may assume,—is to the drawing-rooms of the concluding year of the present decade. When the typical Mrs. Leo Hunter of a bygone generation used to crowd her *salons* with celebrities, the selection was made not merely with reference to the latent abilities which they

possessed, but to the measure of acknowledged distinction which they had achieved. The Mrs. Leo Hunters of our own time are not exacting in their demand for any such title-deeds to fame. In their passionate regard for intellect as an idea, they seem to care but little for any special phase of its manifestation. Once let a man or a woman gain the reputation of intellectuality, and he or she will find ready access to the drawing-rooms of these social show-women of the period. Mind, mind—that is what these ladies want, apart from and independent of any of those its results, which build up a monument more lasting than brass.

Just in proportion as this mind-worship has developed, the crop of humbugs and intellectual impostors has increased. If you go to dine at Mrs. Spirituelle's you will very probably find placed on one side of you a silent and sombre gentleman in black. He affords no particular pleasure to any one else, and seems to derive little enough satisfaction himself. A few attempts are made by his hostess to draw him out, but they are signal failures.

"That is Mr. Nous Aphthartos," murmurs Mrs. Spirituelle with bated breath to you. "Such a brilliant thinker; but he is almost too deep for conversation." Muddiness of mind is usually taken for profundity of thought in these days, and our *savants* are considered deep when in truth they are only perplexed. As for Mrs. Spirituelle's lord and master, he is apt to take a far more material view of matters.

"Hang it, Laura!" that gentleman will probably observe, in the course of his de-habilitation, from his dressing-room that evening, "why on earth do you persist in asking such mute dummies as Aphthartos to the house? What good are they to any one? Who cares whether they have obtained the highest honours that their infernal universities can give, when they can't open their lips to make an ordinary remark, and seem as if they were holding heaven and earth in the balance when they pause to give you an answer to the most ordinary question in the world. By all means let us have clever men, if you're so absurdly fond of cleverness, only don't let them be mere mutes."

"But then, you know," as Mrs. Spirituelle will observe to her friend, Miss Shallowe, "my husband has so little sympathy with mind."

This, then, is one of the main distinctions between the intellectual drawing-rooms of the present day and those of a quarter of a century since. Flimsy pretenders to omniscience, gingerbread bards, and intellectual quacks there were then in plenty; but there was not thrust so prominently upon one's notice the phenomenon that we have just indicated—that ostentatious reverence for the idea of mind which has become nothing less than a species of fetish worship.

The pride of one generation may become the absurdity of the next. The *réunions* which made Holland House famous have passed away. They have, indeed, their

successors. But the progeny, as a rule, is unworthy of the parent, and the imitation, generally speaking, is but a *reductio ad absurdum* of the original. We do, indeed, remember, in the words of Macaulay, "How the last debate was discussed in one corner, and the last comedy of Scribe in another; while Wilkie gazed with modest admiration on Sir Joshua's 'Baretti'; while Mackintosh turned over 'Thomas Aquinas' to verify a quotation; while Talleyrand related his conversations with Barray at the Luxembourg, or his ride with Lannes over the field of Austerlitz." But in the Holland Houses of the present day we realize none of these things. With the Wilkies of the period modesty is an unknown virtue. The erudition of Mackintosh has given place to the self-assertiveness of the disciples of Mr. Mill. And if you come to the "turning over of Thomas Aquinas," why half at least of these gentlemen would be utterly incompetent to translate the text. As for the decadence of conversation, we have already said as much as is needed on the subject. Spontaneity is the source of its excellence, and the social tendencies of the day are not in favour of spontaneity. The fiction of Holland House survives: but we have the spectrum without the fire, the tradition without the reality. The time for such assemblages as used to meet together within the hospitable walls of that mansion, which is "associated with so much that is interesting and noble, with the courtly magnificence of Rich, with the loves of Ormond, with the counsel of Cromwell, with

the death of Addison," is in the nature of things gone by. The *spécialité* of intellectual society has become merged in general society. It is no longer a fact of itself, and apart from other facts. Clever men, great thinkers and brilliant conversationalists we indeed have: but they do not, as they might have done in times past, constitute a distinct order—a separate caste. They have assimilated themselves in their intercourse and social tastes to the general world. The elements of purely literary, scientific, and intellectual circles are to be found now, just as much as they ever were; but they are broadcast in fragmentary fashion upon the surface of existence, and have ceased to constitute a society of themselves: and on the whole it is well for all concerned that it should be so. The leaven does not perform its duty unless it is dispersed throughout the lump.

Brilliant conversationalists, and consequently brilliant conversation, have not, as we have above said, vanished entirely from among us; but it is not in the mimic and anachronistical reproductions of Holland House that they are to be found. "Across the walnuts and the wine," a select company of intimate friends who appreciate his talents and understand his ways, sound claret after a good dinner; as the evening draws later, possibly one, two, three—nay, there is no material objection to thrice three—steaming tumblers of toddy, into which the element of his native whisky preponderates over the element of the water with which it is admin-

gled: given these conditions, place our friend Eglinton Conyers in the midst of them, and if that gentleman is suffering from no abnormal morosity, you may expect to hear some very good talk indeed. Others too there are whom we could mention, an we would, who are ready amid such genial influence to expand and to blossom forth into genuine conversational eloquence. But these are not the conditions or influences of the modern Holland House. Place Eglinton here, and he will be taciturn as an undertaker and gloomy as a bear. Hospitably or joyously to entertain your friends, whose profession is literature, science, or art, is one thing; to feed them with food and to fill them with wine, through a desire of drawing them out, is another. The representatives of literature, science, or art may approve of the former; they will certainly not approve of the latter. Nor is this unnatural. Prodigious and unprecedented hard work is the characteristic of the age, and when the intellectual worker goes into society, he does so with a wish to enjoy a comparative and temporary oblivion of his occupation, or, to employ an undignified vulgarism, "to shake off the shop." Quietly to meet a company of select acquaintances, and at one's ease to discuss subjects of interest, may be agreeable enough; to be expected to maintain the *rôle* of intellect and letters in a promiscuous and heterogeneous assemblage is a thing to be resented.

In spite of all this the tradition of Holland House is in some quarters still faintly perpetuated; the old super-

stition is still kept up, and there are hosts at the present time, with or without titles, who feebly attempt to reproduce the scenes which have shed such a lustre of glory round the historical abode of the accomplished nobleman who especially excited Byron's unjust contempt. To this order of host and hostess belong the Earl and Countess of Tynnefoile. Lord and Lady Tynnefoile do, indeed, pride themselves upon being the only genuine successors now in London of that noble house, which has given to a certain corner of Kensington a tradition and a name.

Do you want to meet the latest literary lion of the day, the author of the last scandalous romance, or the upstart singer of delightfully piquant ballads? Do you wish to be replenished with erudition, or to be amused with gossip, to brood over the oracular responses of *savants*, or to be tickled with a detailed narrative of the last best things that were said at Jack Pungent's supper or the smoking-room of the Pandemonium? Do you wish to have ocular demonstration as to who are the most recently risen stars on the intellectual horizon,—do you wish, in fact, in a promiscuous and nondescript manner, to know "who's who" in any given year of grace? go to Lady Tynnefoile's. Not a very difficult thing either to procure the *entrée* of her Ladyship's drawing-room, or at a pinch her dinner-table. You have but to achieve a reputation for something or other, provided only it be moderately intellectual, and the thing is as good as done. Lady Tynnefoile talks of the select celebrities that frequent her *salons*. Lady Tynne-

foile's enemies change the phrase, and speak of her questionably decorous eccentricities. Lady Tynnefoile commenced her social career under the inspiration of a great idea. That her position in the ordinary course of things was an elevated one, that she was entitled in virtue of this position to wander where, when, and how she would through the mazes of the drawing-rooms of Belgravia and Mayfair—these things were not enough for her. If Lady Tynnefoile admired the accessories of aristocratic existence in the concrete, she was smitten with enthusiasm for mind in the abstract. She was not content with the mere accidents of her rank, she pined for peculiarity. As a contributor in the days of her early youth to the columns of 'Smart's Metropolitan Miscellany,' she felt that she had to a certain extent graduated in letters, and now that she had superadded to a minimum of literary reputation a maximum of social *prestige*, she began to be haunted by great visions. The period of patronage she read had passed. Macænas with his British antitypes Queen Anne, Bolingbroke, Harley, Walpole, had all gone. Fulsome dedications and adulatory title-pages were relegated to the limbo of obsolete usages. Her ladyship, however, was in her own opinion something of a philosopher. Like the polygamous hero of one of Offenbach's latest productions, she was disposed to exclaim, "Il y a dans mon caractère quelque chose de philosophique." Human nature being pretty much the same in all ages, why should not what was possible two hundred years ago be possible

now? If the age of patronage had vanished, that was because patrons and patronesses had ceased to exist, not because authors or artists had ceased to wish to be patronized! Eminently happy thought! Unquestionably lofty ambition! Why should not she—Lady Tynnefoile—revive in its main social features the literary epoch which witnessed the rise of Addison and the 'Spectator,' and the whole tribe of classical English essayists? Why should not what Queen Anne was once, be Tynnefoile now?

It must be confessed that when his lordship first became acquainted with the extent and character of Lady Tynnefoile's aspirations, he did not acquiesce in them with the eagerness which they perhaps deserved. His lordship, however, was but plastic clay in the potter's hands, and after a very insignificant amount of training he completely assimilated his ideas to those of her ladyship. There are some men who never gain recognition on the score of their own individuality, but whose reputation entirely consists of the reflected brilliancy of their matrimonial alliance. When Frank Nihil married Miss Lever, the actress, he soon found that his own being and name were completely merged in those of the lady who had condescended to become his stronger and better half. He ceased to be Frank Nihil of the old days, whose chambers were a synonym for all that was hospitable, and straightway became "Nihil—you know the fellow I mean—man who married Kitty Lever, of the Bow Street Theatre." "Frank," said one of Mr. Nihil's friends to him one

day, in a burst of somewhat uncomplimentary confidence, "what a confounded fool you must be—you think fellows come to see you, let me tell you they only come to see your wife." It was much the same thing with his lordship the Earl of Tynnefoile, who was generally spoken of, not as the possessor of an old territorial title, but the fortunate male whom Maud Chetwynd had honoured with her hand—in fact, till his marriage Tynnefoile had been nobody. Some persons called him a good fellow, others dubbed him an ass. He was not a man for field sports, and he had always lacked the address which might have helped him to make a social hit. Now Tynnefoile was not unconscious of this nothingness, and he hailed with feelings of triumphant satisfaction the period of its termination, which his match with Maud Chetwynd inaugurated. The quasi-intellectual education which her ladyship has succeeded in giving him is a work of art. Go and dine at the Tynnefoiles' house in Cavendish Square. His lordship will take you the round of the drawing-room before dinner is announced, and will expatiate on each particular artistic beauty which it possesses with glibness that might almost induce you to mistake the carefully delivered instructions of her ladyship for the genuine sympathies and the spontaneous criticisms of my lord. That painting he will tell you is a Murillo—somewhat faulty he will add, in his own opinion as regards the arrangement of the shadow, but possessing a lucidity of execution the absence of which is the principal feature

of all English art. That table is pure porphyry, and was exhumed only two years ago from amid the subterraneous remains found on the Palatine Hill. If you go down to Tynnefoile Park, the ancestral seat of the Tynnefoiles, his lordship will give you still more convincing proofs of his gifts of memory, and his power of accurately reproducing her ladyship's hints. But visits to Tynnefoile Park are reserved for the most select of the intellectual lions whom Lady Tynnefoile delights to pet, and to feed as Lesbia did her sparrow with the tips of her dainty fingers. Jumper Jay, whom her ladyship talks of as the English De Musset; Mr. Frederick North, the accomplished comedian —a gentleman, let us add, and undeniably a capital man for a country house; Roderick Rouge the poet, and one or two others are generally to be found at Tynnefoile Park sometime during September; but if we wish to see her ladyship in the plenitude of her perfection as a literary patroness, we must go to the house in Cavendish Square, and not to the place in the country.

A dinner at her ladyship's is by no means an ordinary affair, for the pride of the Tynnefoile establishment is the *chef:* the greater the necessity, therefore, of a careful discrimination in the case of the company invited. Lady T. likes the products of her *cuisine* to meet with the appreciation that they merit, and such appreciation she by no means considers all her intellectual *protégés* capable of bestowing. If it is indispensable for any rising celebrity of the day, who desires to obtain and preserve a

high place in her ladyship's esteem, to sympathize fully with the exquisite spirituality of her delicately pitched temperament, it is also necessary that he should have a nice perception of the refined flavour of a *vol au vent*, or a well-trained palate to recognize the mysterious complications which go to make up an *entrée*. Lady Tynnefoile is fond of talking about her soul. Jealous feminine critics have observed she is evidently of opinion that the soul must be cultivated through the stomach. Mr. Jumper Jay is constantly favoured with invitations to these dinner-parties, so is Mr. North, but then both of these gentlemen are appreciative diners-out as well as eminent members of their respective professions.

It must be confessed that Lady Tynnefoile is somewhat capricious in the dispensation of her favours. There is always some one who is the hero of the hour, but how long it may be before this fortunate being is dethroned from his position is a difficult matter to foretell. The leading lion of one month may be degraded to the condition of an animal of the most inferior order the next, and the hero of to-day may find himself an outcast to-morrow. Two or three seasons ago, with marvellous degree of constancy, Lady Tynnefoile gave uninterrupted precedence in her affections to Mr. Plantagenet Neville, who so suddenly gained a reputation on the strength of his tragedy 'Monmouth.' Mr. Neville was everywhere with her—at her ladyship's dinners and salons, at pic-nic and flower-show, in town and in country, and only forfeited the

golden opinions of his fair patroness by the unblushingly persistent flirtation which he carried on with Miss Golightly during October at Tynnefoile Park. It is one of Lady Tynnefoile's characteristics to brook no rival near her throne.

If you will wander into Lady Tynnefoile's drawing-room to-night you will have the opportunity of judging what is the nature of the scene which on such occasions it ordinarily presents, and of discovering for yourself whom it is that it now pleases her ladyship's whim chiefly to honour. As for the material fittings of her drawing-room, Lady Tynnefoile prides herself on their being not less unique than its intellectual occupants. She sometimes indulges herself with the fancy that she has succeeded in producing, minus the objectionable features of the original, an English edition of the Hôtel Rambouillet.

The marble sculptures show the trained *penchant* for classical art, and together with the triumphs of pictorial skill which grace her walls, the carefully-arranged folds of the drapery that envelop the windows, and a certain careful selection of archaic ornaments and fragments of antique furniture, are intended as eloquently silent tributes to the artists who frequent her ladyship's evening, and as convincing testimonies that in her own way her ladyship is an artist too. Then by way of compliment to the contingent of authors, a few of the newest books are scattered ostentatiously upon tables, and, an additional proof of the wideness of the extent of her ladyship's sympathies, there

are scientific specimens copiously arranged on chiffoniers and mantel-pieces. If you want music, you will be sure to have it, for our hostess nevers fails to secure the presence of one or two moderately brilliant operatic stars, to say nothing of would-be *débutants*. That young gentleman yonder at the piano, who is just commencing to sing, is expected to make his appearance on the stage of Her Majesty's before another season is over. Mr. Felix Tennore—that is his name—has just returned from Milan, at which capital he has spent a year in perfecting himself in the elements of the vocal art, and is exciting the most sanguine anticipations of his friends as to the effect which he will create upon the English stage. He has been induced to throw up a clerkship in a government office on the strength of the auriferous future which he trusts his voice will realize. It was in Lady Tynnefoile's drawing-room that his singing powers first attracted any great attention, and there is nothing which Lady Tynnefoile likes better than the reputation of having been the first to discover the existence of genius, especially if it be of a kind to command publicity, and to obtain success. It is to be hoped Mr. Tennore may not too late discover what others in his position have discovered before—that to have given satisfaction in private is anything but a guarantee against ensuring failure in public. A little bit to the right there you may see the Honourable Miss Pert, the reputed authoress of what are known as the "women articles" in the 'Mastix.'

As a rule, feminine talents do not meet with much recognition or encouragement at her ladyship's hands. For some little time Lady T. fought against inviting Miss Pert to her evenings, but the force of fashion was too strong even for her ladyship, and it was generally admitted that a cabinet of celebrities from which Miss Pert was excluded was signally incomplete. Poor Lady Tynnefoile! She is not aware that Miss Pert is even now gathering materials for an article which will appear in the ensuing number of the 'Mastix,' under the title of "Houses of Brown-Holland." That gentleman standing almost immediately behind Miss Pert's chair is none other than our friend Jumper Jay—clever lyrist and miscellaneously prolific *littérateur*. He is a standing dish in Lady Tynnefoile's drawing-room, and in a variety of ways her ladyship's right-hand man. He has not found his introduction into the Tynnefoile *ménage* by any means an inexpensive proceeding. Indeed, there are persons who tell you that the pace which Mr. Jay has been going since he first took up with her ladyship, is too rapid to last. But Jumper's credit is excellent and the *entrée* into fashionable circles, which acquaintance with her ladyship has ensured him by causing him to discover the descriptions of fashionable life are among his *spécialités*, has at any rate ensured him an income in return for his necessary outlay. Look a little farther in the same direction, and you will see her ladyship herself engaged in conversation with her most recently created *protégé*. Who is he?

Well, as yet, Mr. Mather's claims to distinction are potential rather than actual. Two months ago he produced his first novel: the book has been a very respectable success. Lady Tynnefoile read it, thought there was a good deal of soul in it, and Mr. Mather was at once provided with an introduction to her ladyship, and almost simultaneously received an invitation to Cavendish Square. How long Mr. Mather's reign will last is a matter of speculation among Lady Tynnefoile's acquaintances, and one which is entirely dependent for its solution upon the catalogue of chances which regulate the appearance of the next new favourite. Her ladyship, however, is by no means stationary during the whole course of her entertainment; she moves actively through the crowd that throngs her rooms, and by graceful compliments and seasonable speeches endeavours to weave into one harmonious whole the many diverse threads that make up the texture. She feels that she has a reputation for the success of her evenings to sustain, and she spares no pains to sustain it. Meanwhile she is happy in the thought that she has accomplished the object of her social mission, and that the defunct glories of the veritable Holland House are experiencing no unworthy revival.

To descend from the high level of intellectual drawing-rooms whose *raison d'être* is patronage, let us pass on to another order of *salons*, intellectual still, so far as their ruling element is concerned, but void of the presence of any one such presiding deity as the Countess of Tynne-

foile. Who does not remember, from the experience of narrative at any rate, those delightful evenings which used to be passed in Charles Lamb's chambers in the Temple? Who that reads Sir Thomas Talfourd's chapter, in which he contrasts Lamb's Wednesday's suppers with the Saturday dinners at Holland House, would not barter a considerable amount of social enjoyment to have been present at one of those friendly yet brilliant *réunions?* to have witnessed, when the hot water and its accompaniments appeared, and the severities of whist relaxed as the light of conversation brightened, "Hazlitt uttering fine criticisms with struggling emphasis, Lamb stammering out puns suggestive of wisdom, while Miss Lamb moved gently about to see that each stranger was duly served, turning now and then an anxious, loving eye on Charles, softened into a sort of half-humorous expression of resignation to inevitable fate, as he mixes his second tumbler?" Or better even yet to have been there on any of those great extra nights, when Wordsworth would lay bare his new theory of poetry, or when Coleridge would propound in mellifluous accents his canons of criticism. Lamb has gone, and his period. The meetings that correspond in the present day to those which his biographer has commemorated no longer take place in a Temple attic. The scene is shifted to the drawing-room—a drawing-room conducted, doubtless, on principles very different from those which we have hitherto visited, but in name and in the assertion of its social dignity a drawing-room still.

Mr. and Mrs. Winterton Worksop have a speciality in the way of their Sunday evenings. As it is possible to add considerably to one's stores of experience, to say nothing of one's amusement, by wending our way thither, we will, if you please, take advantage of an invitation which we have received to present ourselves duly at 19, Acacia Terrace, Hampstead, on one of these occasions. Perhaps, you remonstrate, you are not in evening dress: that, we assure you, does not make the slightest difference in the world. Nobody thinks of dressing for the Sunday evenings in Acacia Terrace, and if on your entrance you commence to apologize to Mr. or Mrs. Worksop for the informality of your attire, they will tell you jocosely that the motto of their little *réunions* is, "Working men, come as you are!"

As you ascend the stairs it occurs to you that there is a faint odour of smoke perceptible from above: you enter the room and you discover that your surmise is perfectly correct, and that the aromatic odours of coffee are agreeably intermingled with the fumes of nicotine. Are there any ladies present? Most certainly there are; but they have long since been naturalized to an atmosphere of tobacco; that is to say, when the nature of the weed consumed is not too potent, and the density of its exhalations not too overwhelming. Mr. Winterton Worksop is an exceedingly industrious representative of the class of men of letters: he seldom allows himself more than one completely open evening in the week, and that he reserves

for Sunday; his instincts are hospitable, and he likes to enjoy his leisure in the company of his friends; and you may meet with persons quite as well worth seeing in Mrs. Worksop's drawing-room as in Lady Tynnefoile's more gorgeous apartment. There are one or two of the company here to-night who have something more than a modicum of notoriety. There, engaged in discussing the amusing experiences of his travels, and enunciating his views on literature in general, is Mr. Wentworth Alnutt, the well-known and influential editor of the 'Palladium.' The lady who is occupying his attention is Miss Selfe, who has conceived the notion that she is a tragedienne, and who is, in the opinion of others than herself, an elegant actress with a pretty face. In spite of Mr. Worksop's numerous other avocations, he has found time to write a five-act drama for this young lady, which is about to be produced at the Theseum Theatre. A few minutes later and you will see Mr. Worksop himself walk up to where Mr. Alnutt and Miss Selfe are sitting with a bulky manuscript in his hand; that is the immortal work, the five-act tragedy, which is at once to secure Mr. Worksop's claim to rank on an equality with Shakespeare, and Miss Selfe's entire right to a position of supreme exaltation in Thespian annals. It is whispered, by-the-by, that if Mr. Worksop ever allows himself to be guilty for a moment of an imaginary infidelity to the wife of his bosom, pretty Miss Selfe is the *fons et origo mali*. Persons, too, there are malicious enough to say that this

circumstance has something to do with the indefatigable energy which Mr. Worksop displays in writing dramas for the young lady in question. In a murmurous undertone Mr. Worksop commences to read his tragedy to Miss Selfe and Mr. Alnutt. The undertone, however, is but a modest bid for a wider audience, and when a request is made that Mr. Worksop will give the general company the benefit of his composition, he requires no very inordinate amount of pressing to comply with it. The tragedy accordingly is read with much enthusiasm on the part of the author, and a satisfactory measure of approbation on the part of the audience. There is, it is true, a little suppressed criticism of an unfriendly nature, emanating *sotto voce* from that rather majestic and Junonian lady who sits immediately opposite Miss Selfe, and evidently listens very scrupulously to every word that is read. Miss Dallwyn is, or rather was, herself a tragic actress (and we call her here by her stage name as having married a literary critic of considerable standing), is in her own estimation no mean judge of such productions as the present. Miss Dallwyn remarks to her next-door neighbour that she thinks this situation unnatural, that weak, this portion of the plot exaggerated, that particular incident overstrained. In the same vein she goes on to say, glancing awhile down on her own well-developed figure, that in her honest opinion Miss Selfe is deficient in the *physique* altogether necessary for such parts as she essays. No doubt Miss Selfe is exceedingly pretty—

"a rather negative style of beauty, don't you think, Mr. Snarler?—but something more than prettiness of feature and symmetry of form are required to make a true tragic heroine." It should be mentioned, by-the-by, that Miss Dallwyn is ambitious of a histrionic re-engagement, and up to the present moment has been unsuccessful in finding one. However—so much for feminine sincerity—when Mr. Worksop's recitation is over, Miss Dallwyn is the first to rise from her chair, compliment the author on what he has written, and congratulate Miss Selfe on having got a part which she (Miss Dallwyn) is sure "will suit her so admirably."

On such an occasion as the present Mr. Worksop finds it convenient to invite to his Sunday evenings one or two theatrical critics with whom he happens to be on terms of intimacy. There is Mr. Dogma—that rather imposing-looking, middle-aged man with shaggy hair and redundant beard. Mr. Dogma is supposed to be possessed of a good deal of theatrical erudition; and though the journals to which he contributes dramatic notices are not in other ways the most influential in the metropolis, his histrionic criticisms are considered nevertheless valuable and sound. Possibly, too, there is Mr. Jabez Oliphant, whose services as an ally it is more necessary to secure even than those of Mr. Dogma. The evening, however, has now somewhat advanced; it is, in fact, close upon Monday morning, and the announcement is made that supper is ready in the dining-room below; and with this announcement

we will take our leave of the literary drawing-room of Acacia Terrace.

There is no need to dwell on each particular variety of the intellectual drawing-room of the nineteenth century. We have them of all kinds: elegant and fashionable—such as Lady Tynnefoile's; relaxed and unceremonious—such as Mr. and Mrs. Worksop's; severely and ascetically learned—such as Miss Veneering's in Russell Square, where the talk is aridly scientific and the demeanour of the company uniformly chilly; still more relaxed and unceremonious than the Worksop's, as used to be Tom Easy's Friday nights in Brompton, when, in that snug little drawing-room situated in one of the streets leading out of Ovington Square, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Easy were glad to receive all their friends any time between the hours of 10 at night and 1 in the morning; and pleasant Mrs. Tom would sit pluckily through all the smoke, and put in just the general kinds of criticism that were needed just at the necessary moment. Nor is it at all necessary to dwell on the different varieties of conversation to be heard in the drawing-rooms that have furnished the subject of this chapter. As we have explained before, literary table-talk has no one distinct and peculiar home. The conversation which forms the staple of these apartments is nothing more than chit-chat and gossip: you may hear, for instance, who is the author of that poem in the last number of 'Blackwood' which has made such a hit; what is the exact sum which Mr. Multiform Momus is to receive

for his novel, published by the eminent firm of Rubber and Dubber; how it is that the business of Messrs. Wise has been transferred to the hands of Messrs. Wary; why Jumper Jay has ceased to edit the 'Mayfair Magazine;' or upon what principles the appearance of that slashing attack upon Mrs. Duffer's new novel in the 'Scrutator' is to be explained. In a word, you may be feasted with an infinity of trade secrets and narratives of literary job-work: you may listen till you are sick of hearing it, to a recapitulation of the calamities, quarrels, and eccentricities of contemporary authors. But if your ideal of literary conversation includes the notion of lucid extemporary criticism and brilliant explanation of artistic canons, it will certainly not be realized under such circumstances as these. You will have the secrets of the shop unfolded to you—not the principles of the art explained.

CHAPTER VIII.

RELIGIOUS DRAWING-ROOMS.

"Men not measures" the cry of the day: witness especially the case of Religion — Necessity before passing on to the subject of Religious Drawing-rooms of examining changes in *personnel* of English Clergy — Extinction of the old-fashioned Parson — The fast Parson — The Rev. Chasuble Rapid — The pet Parson — Different species — Mrs. Blushington Stole's Drawing-room — After service at Miss Squeamish's — The Misses Peckster — Dinner at the Rev. Christopher Cantor's — The Sequel — Concluding remarks.

RELIGIOUS drawing-rooms and their occupants have had no reason of late to complain of scantiness in the measure of attention which the novelist or the essayist has directed towards them. High Church drawing-rooms and Low Church, Ritualistic ladies, young and old, Evangelical, Dissenting, or Nonconformist, have been held up to us in every conceivable phase. In spite, or in consequence of this ubiquity of treatment, the religious drawing-room is still a great fact among us, and these volumes would be guilty of a grievous error of omission if they were to pass them over here. The religious or quasi-religious society of the day is neither one of the least fertile nor least attractive themes to the historian and the student of contemporary manners and men. Into the deeper elements of this sub-

ject, and of the questions to which it gives rise, it is scarcely to be expected that we should enter here. We shall, however, not merely be innocent of all suspicion of impropriety, but be simply making good the pretensions which the title of these volumes holds out, if we portray just so much of the superficial features of religious circles, and the various elements of which they are composed, as comes naturally within the province of the drawing-room chronicler.

Not in politics alone is this pre-eminently a period of men rather than measures—an age in which we give so far as possible the lie to the Laureate's line,

> "And the individual withers and the world is more and more,"

and fix our attention less upon the principle he expounds and illustrates, than upon the expositor and illustrator himself. Philosophy and its results may announce to us authoritatively that there is either no such thing as individual influence, or else that it is infinitesimal in its value; and philosophy may be perfectly right in the long run. But the bulk of mankind is not philosophical, and does not look at matters with a scientific eye. Most Englishmen pay a great deal more attention to Mr. Disraeli or to Mr. Gladstone, as men, than to the political principles of which they stand forth as the representatives; and just as people will connect the name of the one with the passing of the Reform Bill, so will they look at the other as the chosen instrument of the

downfall of the Irish Church. The method of regarding history as a portrait gallery of eminent men, and of writing it accordingly, is a great deal more interesting to the imagination than the habit of looking at it simply as the triumphant progress of abstract principles. Hero worship is not likely to lose its popularity; and a system of thought which seems coldly impersonal, inhuman, and repulsive, infallible though it may be, is not the thing to suit the sentimental instincts of the multitude.

If these remarks hold true in any case at all, it is assuredly in that of religious teaching. This is an age of enthusiastic sectarianism and warm religious partizanship. But though the battle rages, or may appear to rage, round the essential principles of conflicting doctrines, for the mass of the religionists themselves the true centres of the fight are not the antagonistic creeds, but the men whom they recognize as the preachers and champions of these creeds. They lose sight of the broadly impersonal truths at issue, and fix their eyes with steadfast exclusiveness on the human embodiments of the dogmas for which they struggle and dispute. In a word, for the immense majority of persons interested, as the cant phrase goes, in the religious questions and discussions of the day, the parson is all in all, the epitome, concentration, and amalgam of everything for which they contend, while the abstract views of which he may happen to be the mouthpiece are only recognized under the shadow of his name, as the opinions which Mr. So-and-So holds. When the war of

creeds is spoken of, it practically means the opposition of the congregation that sits beneath the ministrations of Mr. Smirke to that which looks upon Mr. Thunder as its spiritual head and pastor. It becomes a question of the personal influence of an individual, rather than of the absolute truth of doctrines. To revert to the phrase which we employed above, it is degraded into a matter of men, and ceases to be one of measures.

Under these circumstances, it is naturally to be expected that the central point round which the existence of the religious drawing-room revolves should be an individual too. *Quot homines, tot sententiæ;* and it would probably be scarcely an exaggeration to say that the various kinds of *salons* in which the predominant element savours of the ecclesiastical are almost as numerous as the different social types of clergymen that are to be found. On the principle which we have already stated as contained in the relation between congregation and pastor, it is highly necessary that we should preface any remarks that we have to make of religious drawing-rooms in general with a glance at some of these.

There is, perhaps, no one body of men whose *personnel* has of late years undergone a more complete change than the English clergy. Old types are rapidly becoming extinct, and new are every day springing up in their stead. It is not easy to note the gradual disappearance of certain time-honoured specimens of the priestly dignitary without experiencing a kind of melancholy regret.

Only now and then, in out-of-the-way country parishes, and in the pages of an occasional novel, do we come across members of the old-fashioned class of clergymen, who managed effectually to unite in their own persons the characters of priest and squire. Doubtless they had their faults, and their spirituality was not without an admixture of Mammonism. Their curates were very probably chosen even more with an eye to social accomplishments than to unlimited preaching power and parochial energy. But they acted up to their own conceptions of their duty in a laudable manner. They felt quite as much horror and disgust at the young clerical upstart who objected to bolting the Thirty-nine Articles whole, or carped at their own loyal traditions respecting the indissoluble relation of Church and State, as they did at the smug curate who had no eye for the points of a horse, or who would have thought of standing on his head quite as readily as of going out for a day's pheasant shooting with the county magnates. Nor were they perhaps, altogether free from a certain tinge of illiberal bigotry. To differ from them in political, theological, or social views was, in their eyes, a species of intolerable conceit. They had their own opinion as to the probable nature and extent of the Divine mercy in such cases, and they did not hesitate secretly to anticipate the severest measure of condemnation for innovating quacks who ventured to broach any new-fangled theories as to the interpretation of a passage from Scripture, or

the breeding of oxen and Southdowns. What the Whig is in the political world, such is this type of clerical character in the ecclesiastical. Both are products of a generation and a state of things that are past, and we may as soon expect to see them flourish and multiply again as to find humanity with one accord deserting the express trains to travel by the mail coach.

Modern clerical developments are of quite a different kind. We have enthusiastic and energetic clergymen of every conceivable order and degree, from the highest of the high to the lowest of the evangelical persuasion. We have the mild, school-visiting, weak-eyed, tea-drinking, croquet-playing curate, with a strong conviction that he stands in need of feminine sympathy; the pet parson, who finds his way as naturally into the drawing-rooms of fashionable watering-places as a fly into a sugar-basin; the comical parson, who is great in organizing archery clubs and bazaars, as well as in enacting the part of social buffoon on every possible opportunity; the dancing parson, the hunting parson, and, lastly, the parson who is denominated *par excellence* "fast." Ubiquitous as types of this latter objectionable growth of ecclesiasticism may be, and familiar as they are in the same degree to drawing-rooms and smoking-rooms, they cannot be held to have any very immediate connection with the subject of this chapter. It is precisely in those drawing-rooms whose speciality is religion that you are least likely to find the fast clergyman. If you want to meet the Rev.

Chasuble Rapid, you will make a great mistake if you endeavour to discover him at one of Miss Acolyte's early evening parties, or at one of Mrs. Censor's serious afternoons. Mr. Rapid, it is true, is High Church; but then he is High Church simply because it has seemed to him the correct thing to be. High Churchism and Ritualism, by the same token, have become very fashionable lately, and you scarcely come across a ball-room embodiment of feminine inanity who does not tell you confidingly in the intervals of the waltz that she is "oh, so High Church," and that "papa doesn't quite like it, you know." The kind of society which Chasuble affects in his leisure moments is much more that which is to be seen gathered round Capt. Punter's dinner-table or crowded together in the drawing-room of that charming and rather fast widow, Mrs. Fazakerly. Mr. Rapid is by no means one who carries what he rather profanely styles "the shop" about him. Indeed, he is never satisfied unless you plainly let him know your opinion that it is only the high-level of the pulpit eminence which he is required to assume two or three times during the week that differentiates him from the least immaculate of his fellow-men. There is a noisy frivolity in his manner and tone which is intended publicly to proclaim that he is not to be classed among the *ignobile vulgus* of his cloth. He has not one of those effeminate, squeamish natures which turns away from a good racy story with loathing and disgust. Nothing is too broad, too outspoken for the Rev. Chasuble

Rapid. You may say anything you like; and if you want your remark to be capped by a sound piece of professional blasphemy, you might go farther and fare worse. Nothing pleases him so much as to hold up to ridicule before a select audience in Mrs. Fazakerly's drawing-room, or to shock in society, by his boisterous rapidity, his milder fellow-labourer in the same vineyard of souls—his brother curate—should he have accepted an invitation to one of Capt. Punter's dinners. He will tell you in confidence that those daily services at which he is compelled to officiate are the most horrible of bores; that he is absolutely without an idea for his next Sunday's sermon; and that, as he is engaged every moment of his time, he supposes he must trust to some happy inspiration as he ascends the pulpit-stairs. He feels a secret pride in causing elderly spinsters to tremble at his exhibition of clerical mutiny, and in reflecting that his friends, far and wide, are pleased to consider him "a bright specimen of a parson." As for Mr. Chasuble Rapid's genesis, it is easy enough to trace, and the chances are that he will volunteer any one who engages him in conversation a few choice autobiographical sketches. His university career had come to an end; he had put on his gown—there were bills to pay, and the paternal patience was exhausted. Suddenly it struck him one morning that he would go into the Church. A curacy was offered him; and here his eventful history for the present ends.

There is a capital story which the Rev. Chasuble Rapid

tells, and with which he has delighted frequently before now the guests at Capt. Punter's dinners and in Mrs. Fazakerly's drawing-room. We should observe, perhaps, that the present scene of Mr. Rapid's ministrations is Brighton. Well, our friend Chasuble went up to town some two or three years ago to meet some old college friends. He really did not see why he should wear what he calls "his livery"—*i. e.* his regular ecclesiastical attire—when he was knocking about London. It amounts to nothing less than a badge of servitude, which it is sheer cruelty to forbid him never to doff. Well, Chasuble goes on to inform:—"I was breakfasting that day with Tuppitt, and Snobkins, and Cadmore, and several others of the whole Trinity lot, and when we had kept it up with cigars and S. and B. till about five, we thought we would take a turn into the Park. Gad, we hadn't gone a hundred yards when we met the bishop and my rector. They stared at me, but unaccustomed as they were to see me out of my uniform and with a cigar, they failed to recognize me. About a fortnight after that I was dining with my chief, Mr. Rapid, and the Rev. B. Tonkyns, the above-mentioned rector, when the old boy said, 'It is a curious thing, Mr. Rapid, but as I was walking with his lordship the other day in Hyde Park I passed a gentleman whose face bore such a similarity to yours, that had it not been for the secular nature of his attire I could almost have declared that it was you. Have you any brothers, Mr. Rapid, of an age nearly coequal with your own?'"

But our sketch of the Rev. Chasuble Rapid—his sayings and doings, his escapades, related with so much unction and relish in the drawing-rooms in which we have seen him—partake somewhat of the nature of a digression. The fast clergyman, as we have explained, is very much the reverse of indigenous to the religious drawing-room. The clerical developments mainly to be met with in the *salons* of ecclesiastical piety may be said to belong, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, to the order known as pet parsons. The pet parson is the standard dish. He is the main planet of the system round which the other stars of the drawing-room describe their orbits. He gives the watchword to the fair creatures who surround him. They hang upon his utterances; they take his remarks as the text for their own conversational disquisitions. He lives in an atmosphere of drawing-room incense and feminine adulation. We might as well look for figs on thistles, for grapes on thorns, for citron groves in the wilds of Siberia, or an oasis in the middle of the Atlantic, as expect the pet parson to exist in a rude country village, amid clodhoppers and boors. He is at best an exotic plant, and it is only under very genial circumstances that he will unfold his delicate bloom. He is a kind of spiritual butterfly, loving to haunt the gilded saloons of the more polite, and therefore the more curable, workers of iniquity. In the air of fashionable watering-places there seems to be something marvellously favourable to his growth! and it is here that he exists in a greater variety

than elsewhere. But in the midst of all this multiplicity there is unity. The "pet parson" as a pulpiteer may either anathematize or bless; but, however he may conduct himself in this eminence, when brought down to the level of ordinary mortality, he must study to please. He must diligently visit the various members of his congregation; must be acquainted not only with their religious needs, but with their worldly tastes; he must have the knack of insinuating himself into the affections of maiden ladies of a certain age; and must also be capable of kindling with a mild glow the hearts of more youthful damsels. He must be sufficiently versed in the news of the day to talk to heads of families, though male intercourse as a rule he eschews; he is far more at home in feminine circles, where he finds the atmosphere especially kindly, and his merits at length meet with their due appreciation. It need hardly be said that by the rough parochial work, which is the portion of the less fortunate divine, his gentle spirit will never be vexed. The chances are that his district has none of this work to be done; or if there do exist miserable sinners who live in narrow streets and squalid dwellings, he will do well to employ an enterprising Scripture reader. The "pet parson" has a higher vocation than to visit the mere poor; a far less refined paraclete is sufficient for them. When in the pulpit, there are two distinct characters which he is at liberty to assume. Should he elect to play the *rôle* of our friend, the Rev. Morphine Velvet, he will preach a won-

derfully comforting Gospel to an enraptured audience. After all, the way to heaven is neither so narrow nor so rough as it has been sometimes represented. Under judicious guidance, it may be travelled with great ease. We have but to accompany him, the reverend gentleman by whom we are addressed, and he will put us in the right way. It is quite marvellous to see how one object after another is removed. We find that we have all along been magnifying molehills into mountains. We really are not such "miserable sinners" as we have avowed ourselves modestly to be. And as we hear this cheering news, an almost angelic smile lights up the countenance of the preacher. All is as clear now as the noonday sun; no more perplexity and no more doubt. We may depart to our luncheons and dinners, as the case may be, with the sound of his melodious blessing still making music in our ears, and may eat and drink in peace. As we return to our homes we shall hear subdued murmurs of praise and applause uttered by the dispersing congregation.

But next, the pet parson may appear in a very different guise. We have just witnessed the lamb; let us now look at the lion. There is a certain class of minds that is not satisfied by a diet of spiritual narcotics. Milk may do very well for some, but others require strong meat. And this craving must be supplied. Thus it is very right that clergymen should not confine themselves to discourses of one sort alone. They must be all things to all men. One of the characters in Mrs. Oliphant's very

excellent novel, 'Salem Chapel,' expresses her spiritual requirements in these remarkable words:—"What we want is a man as preaches Gospel sermons, real rousing-up discourses, and sits down pleasant to his tea, and makes hisself friendly." Now we may find here a perfect description of the second species of that class of which the Rev. Boanerges Calvin may be accepted as a type. "Real rousing-up discourses" are what some prefer; while others, as we have seen, love to rest upon the downy bed of blessings. We now meet with a pulpit demeanour wholly differing from that which we have before witnessed. The scene changes altogether. The road to beatitude is not only rugged but altogether inaccessible; we must make our way in fear and trembling, and we shall probably miss it then. If many are called, we must remember that very few are chosen; and what reason have we for supposing that we are among those few? If we offend in one point, we are guilty of all; and who is without offence? Such is the general tenour of the remarks which are made by the Rev. Boanerges. He gloats over all he says, and chuckles complacently to himself as he preaches them glad tidings of damnation. The more terrible the doom which he denounces, the more exultant and jubilant does his tone become. There is a fierce glow of triumph upon his face as he tells us the miserable fate which is coming upon us all. In spite of the extreme opposition which exists between these two poles of pet parsondom, it is curious to observe how closely on occasions, in a certain

sense extra professional, these two antagonistic divines coincide. On the neutral ground of the drawing-room, when surrounded by a select coterie of discriminating admirers, both alike are suavity and mildness personified. Boanerges, who was so terrible in his pulpit, is gentle and meek. In the words of our quotation, "he sits down pleasant to his tea," or possibly potations more potent, and "makes hisself friendly;" while Mr. Morphine Velvet, always amiable, is more so than ever now. The lion and the lamb lie down together!

Religious drawing-rooms, High Church or Low Church, are all alike in the one point on which we alluded at the commencement of the chapter. The devotion of their occupants is a devotion less to the principles that are preached than to the preachers who preach them; and their conversation is exactly what might be expected as a consequence of this fact. Its sempiternal subject matter is the *personnel* of piety. If you go into the drawing-room of Mrs. Blushington Stole, you have as perfect a specimen as is possible of the fashionable ritualistic *salon* of the day. The apartment is elegantly fitted up with all manner of High-Church knick-knacks. There are quaint designs for altar-pieces: there is a profusion of slender brass candlesticks, top-heavy with the ponderous and variegated burden of its wax light. On the table you will notice a number of the most approved and most recently issued tractarian publications—from the last new manual on the subject of vespers, matins, and masses,

down to dear Mr. Reredos' sermon, preached only a few Sundays ago and published by special desire, on Penitential Absolution. Scattered throughout the chamber are embroidery-frames, instruments for illumination, stoles which have just been commenced, or slippers for the object of Mrs. Blushington Stole's veneration, which are half completed. 'Tis a comfortable room, though—luxurious even, and not the reverse of seductive in the influences which you feel steal over you, as you plant yourself upon the yielding satin cushions of one of those daintily-fashioned settees, inhale the fragrant odours

> "From petal of flower, or from mouchoir of maiden
> Lavished by nature, or bought from Piesse,"

that float upon the air, and criticize the complex volumes of the pellucid drapery which flutters in the breeze in the region of the window. And Mrs. Blushington Stole herself! Nothing of the ascetic religieuse about her. She is a remarkably prosperous-looking and well-kept little woman. She has the most transparent complexion imaginable: the most dainty little mouth, and a piquant manner of shrugging her shoulders and glancing at you significantly the while, which is positively ravishing. Then her widow's cap—that delicate complication of crape and gauze, suits her exactly—so irremediable is Mrs. B. S.'s grief for her lamented husband, that she tells you she never intends to lay aside her garb of mourning—and as you look from her dress to her face, and from her face to her dress, you are drawn irresistibly to the con-

clusion that a well-fitting dress of sombre hue is the perfection of costume for a ripe brunette with hazel eyes.

But as we have said, Mrs. Blushington Stole's drawing-room is no ordinary mundane apartment. It is the very essence of a religious drawing-room of the High Church description, whether you regard the nature of the furniture, or the description of the fair feminine tenants who cause its atmosphere to be murmurous with their small talk and smaller criticisms. And small in dimensions, as well as purely anecdotical in style, both of these certainly are. Mrs. Blushington S. remarks that that dear Mr. Oriel Cope is looking dreadfully ill, or that his cassock is sadly in want of repair, or that his hair is a little more untidy than usual, or that his cheeks paler, or that he ought to take beef-tea at breakfast or port-wine negus at lunch. Miss Reredos will, on the other hand, observe—she had something in the way of a huff, by-the-by, with Mr. Oriel Cope at Mrs. Fitz-Cameron's croquet-party the other day—that she thought the gentleman in question wears the appearance in a singular degree of sleek prosperity; that she believes his Lenten fasts are merely a bid for drawing-room sympathy—here Miss Reredos shows her discrimination—and that on the whole she is strongly disposed to look upon Mr. Cope as a humbug and a quack. These pungent censures will perhaps cause a little sort of fluttering in Mrs. Blushington Stole's drawing-room. The two Miss Flintoffs and the solitary Miss Raid will gather together in the bemuslined recess

of Mrs. Blushington's window, and interchange remarks with each other, remarkable neither for their reserve of expression or their amenity of sentiment, to the effect that Miss Reredos has, if they may be allowed to say so, been setting her cap at Mr. Cope in a most shameless manner lately; that she is monstrously jealous, if the truth is to be known, of his attentions to Miss Almoner, and that her utterances are all of them nothing better than the forgeries of discontent. And so the evening wears away. Occasionally a criticism is made by the Misses Harmony on the Gregorians which were chanted at Matins or Complines yesterday, or a few remarks are offered on the subject of the most appropriate binding for the Common Book of Prayer. Later on perhaps no less a person than Mr. Oriel Cope himself. Mrs. Blushington will be effusive, Miss Reredos will be resentful and coy, while Mr. Cope will discuss the latest injunction which the archbishop has issued against Mr. Highflyer, or the latest quarrel which he has had with his parishioners.

Perhaps the conversation which you may hear any Sunday just before lunch at Miss Squeamish's is a trifle more serious in its character. Miss Squeamish, rigidly evangelical and Calvinistic, or certain of what she is pleased to call her religious views are, insuperable as are her objections to the opening of any newspapers in her house on the Lord's day, and—an inevitable consequence—limitless as is the consumption of novels in the bedrooms and the private apartments, veiled beneath the con-

venient pretence of the afternoon retirement upstairs for purposes of devotion or a nap—there is nothing, curious to relate, which Miss Squeamish likes better than a friendly gathering after morning church. All your impressions of the service are then fresh, and as a consequence it is to be presumed trustworthy. Then is the time to expatiate with accuracy upon the merits of a sermon, or to recall with precision the details of a dress. The Misses Passez, with that piquancy and genuineness which are so pre-eminently their natural characteristics, in a delightful succession of conversational vicissitudes, by turns extol the excellence of that morning's singing, or deprecate the taste betrayed in the Miss Dowdie's eccentric costume. How these Christians hate one another! How lamentably inapplicable is the phrase originated by the spectacle of apostolic amity to the professors of the Galilean creed at the present day! If you want to see a raking up and ostentation of the worst and most malignant passions of our depraved humanity; if you want to have scandal, misinterpretation, and gossip; if you wish to know how one woman can abuse another; if you are desirous to be *au courant* with all the latest Parisian modes; if it is your ambition to have clearly defined ideas as to how Miss Black's dress fits, or why Mrs. Dash's mantle is incongruous and worthless, and if you wish in fine to see feminine nature at its worst, weakest, and most contemptible point, go to such a drawing-room as that which we have mentioned and at such a time. Listen to the

babble of its fair occupants. If you are anxious to have an accurate catalogue of the costumes, even of the false chignons, displayed, and of the exact amount of paint which veneered Miss So-and-So's countenance, you can realize your ambition without even being put to the trouble of entering the church. These *religieuses*—they go to see, not to hear—they enter the conventicle to observe, and they come away to criticize.

But *est qui fruge Cleantheâ purgatas inserat aures.* We are admonished by our religious sense that we have been treating the subject of religious drawing-rooms in a vein altogether too sportive, considering the magnitude of our design.

A very serious affair indeed is the drawing-room of the Misses Peckster—a family of three maiden ladies who live together in Imperial Crescent, Clapham. If you receive an invitation to one of their fortnightly Thursday Evenings, it is well before you accept it that you should know what to expect. The idol of the Misses Peckster is the Rev. Bloker Hum, and consequently the great standing dish and central luminary on the occasion of the little social meetings which we have above mentioned. What is the order of proceedings? There is the tea and toast, and a little conversation of a very small description indeed, during which the Rev. Mr. Hum sits at ease in his chair, his coarse misshapen legs plunged out to the full tether of their ungainly length, while attendant nymphs, in the shape of the Misses Peckster and Co.,

flutter lightly round his chair, plying their pastor and pet with muffins, seed-cake, and other delicacies of a like order.

"Sadly worldly and trifling this tone of talk," remarks Miss Seraphina Peckster sentimentally through her nose.

"Nay, Miss Seraphina," responds the divine, "I for one would not repress the innocent ebullitions of the youthful spirit; rather would I act upon the apostolic maxim, and become all things to all men, if by any means I should win any,"—by way of accomplishing which feat of spiritual triumph Mr. Hum smiles unctuously upon a promising young city clerk, with a fondness for the Miss Pecksters' teas and a tendency to interchange mildly amatory compliments with a washed-out looking young lady on the neighbouring sofa, and interpolates very likely some ponderous piece of badinage relative to the state of the weather or the condition of the Clapham omnibuses. In the whole world there is nothing more detestable than sham geniality; and the fun of the Rev. Bloker Hum, if fun it is to be called—the reverend gentleman likes to think of himself as possessed of a gently playful humour, such as a good man may discreetly indulge —is offensively spurious, just as his laugh sounds exactly like a slightly disguised nasal snivel. This sort of frolic may be all very well for a short time, but it is essentially unprofitable, and as such to be eschewed. Presently the great and good man will get uneasy in his chair, will clear his throat, will look from Miss Seraphina Peckster to Miss Chanty, and will remark that the evening wears away.

The bell is rung, the tea-things vanish. Not a face in the room but is distorted into an expression of lugubrious solemnity. As if by magic a row of three chairs is arranged at the further end of the room, which are occupied by the complement of the Peckster *ménage* menials, who enter dismally in single file. The Rev. Bloker Hum is asked whether he is ready. He advances to the round table, and having observed that occasions such as these are blessed opportunities for invoking the Divine benediction, suggests that a hymn should be sung. The Sunday-school teaching young man and the washed-out looking young lady share a book between them. Accidentally it falls to the ground. In endeavouring to pick it up the incipient whiskers of the youth happen to brush against the cheeks of the maid. There is a blush, and something very like a giggle. Miss Seraphina eyes the peccant pair steadily, and for the remainder of the evening they are regarded as the black sheep of the assembly. However, the hymn is sung; then Mr. Hum vouchsafes an extempore explanation of a chapter of Scripture, finally ensues a course of extempore prayer—this in public seems the essence of Evangelicalism—and after the expiry of an hour the Rev. Bloker Hum announces that the affair is over. A little interval of ginger-wine and caraway-cake ensues. It is horribly late—actually nine; farewells are taken; the Rev. Mr. Hum is thanked for his refreshing discourse; and the Misses Peckster Thursday Evening is at a close.

Have you ever dined at the Rev. Christopher Cantor's? Now, Mr. Cantor is quite a gentleman, will entertain you hospitably, is glad to see you, and has an excellent house. Listening to his conversation over the post-prandial glass of wine, you would discover no signs of remarkable eccentricity about him. He seems much like other mortals, wholly undesirous of importing any of his clerical attributes into the general tenour of the talk. Nor when you have entered the drawing-room for tea and music do you see anything to make you feel that you are in a *salon* essentially different in any respect from those in which you are usually accustomed to take your place? Mr. Cantor is simply a quiet, well-bred gentleman, just as his wife and daughters are quiet, well-bred ladies. And so the time ebbs away till ten o'clock. Precisely at that hour a sonorous gong makes its buzzing music heard from one end of the house to the other. It drowns the babble in the drawing-room; it swamps the notes of the piano; and as for you—why it positively causes you, just as you are on the brink of saying one of your best things, to leap from your sofa in astonishment and dismay. What is up? you think to yourself. Fire or thieves—which is it? As for the remainder of the company, those who are *habitués* of the house at once understand the nature of the situation. They drop their voices, and draw back their chairs. Nor have you long to wait. The door opens. Enter first the family butler, bearing the family Bible with the Cantor arms emblazoned conspicuously on its bindings;

next to him comes a footman, overwhelmed with a mountainous pile of smaller volumes in his arms; next to him a couple of pages appear, carrying between them a small reading-table; and finally the procession is closed by the rank and file of the servants of the establishment. The table is placed in a particular corner of the room. One of the smaller volumes just mentioned, and which you now discover to be various copies of the New Testament, is placed in the hand of each of the Rev. Mr. Cantor's guests; and your host, seated away in the dim distance over the ancestral and scriptural volume, announces that he is going to read such and such a chapter of such and such Evangelist. More than this, you quickly discover that the whole company assembled are expected to take an active part in the devotional administrations. First one person reads a verse, then another, till it comes at last to your immediately right-hand neighbour, and finally to yourself. This ordeal may be and doubtless is extremely commendable in point of design. The only thing is, you are disposed to question the utility of its execution. There is no doubt that the Rev. Mr. Cantor means excellently well; but you may be pardoned if it strikes you that this wind-up of prayer to a mildly agreeable and social evening is instituted upon a principle something similar to that on which ladies who occasionally fix impromptu dances for Saturday night, and who thus are apt to protract their gaiety till Sunday morning has fairly arrived, seem to think that they have made ample atone-

ment for the profanity thus committed, if they instruct their *pianiste* to wind-up proceedings by playing a sonata from Handel, or even the national air, "God save the Queen." If Mr. Cantor thought that the effects of a mild dinner party were so vitiating as to require the cleansing influence of a final prayer, it was open to him in the first place not to give the dinner party at all. If he believes that devotions should naturally close the day, he might remember and act upon the scriptural advice *à propos* of retiring into one's own chamber for such purposes. If, thirdly, it was his desire to invite you to a prayer-meeting, why should he not have said so at once, and then you would have understood the arrangement. On the whole we object to assemblages which partake of a compromise between the *réunions* of Little Bethel and the dinner parties of an English gentleman. Both are excellent things in their way, but both are spoiled by confusion.

But we have lingered sufficiently long upon this portion of our theme, infinite as is the length to which we might naturally produce it. Needless here to tell of the numerous devices popular with young ladies, in whose nature the force of piety contends with that of fashion, who, under pretence of consummating works of religious charity, meet together on certain evenings in the week, having banded themselves previously together into a species of needlework-for-the-poor society, and discover that it is quite possible agreeably to intermingle the

occupation of religion with the indulgence of worldly tastes, and that on the whole there are things less intolerable than to hem the dress of a pauper child, or to sew the tuck of an old crone's petticoat, the while one listens to the latest scandal of the drawing-room, or to the warmest details of the most recent sensation novel. We live in an age of humbug; we have humbugs on every side of us; but religious humbugs, male and female —especially the latter—are the most injurious and incorrigible of all.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DRAWING-ROOM HISTRIONIC.

Sunday morning — What to do? — A drive to Thespis Villa — Miss Lavelle the Actress — Her Drawing-room — Actresses in general, and Miss Lavelle in particular — An Actress's engagements and correspondence — Dinner at Richmond — Mademoiselle Dupin's Drawing-room — Eccentricity of popular taste in feminine matters.

A FINE breezy summer morning, the day Sunday — if that will not shock your Sabbatarian prejudices, most exemplary reader—a long lounging breakfast, placidly terminated with an unimpeachable Havannah, in your own chambers, your favourite arm-chair drawn close up to the open window, from which you command a *coup d'œil* of the neighbouring square, say St. James's, and from which you can catch just enough glimpse of the green trees which fling their shadows in the carefully kept enclosure to give you an appetite for more of the freshness of nature, and to set you—assuming your mood, as it probably will be, to be somewhat meditative—"babbling of green fields." What is the programme of the day? Like the menial drudge who conscientiously sweeps out your apartment every morning, Sunday is your "day out." Not for you, we fear, the assembling of yourself together as

the manner of some is. Not for you the stuffy conglomeration of fashionable conventicles, the gorgeous array of well-dressed souls who come professedly to hear a pet preacher or to experience the meretriciously intoxicating delights of a ritualistic service, but come in reality for the contemplation of divers species of costume, and for the acquisition of a fund of critical observations with which at some future time, in that amusing satirical style of yours, you will shock virtuous dames and amuse *ci-devant religieuses*. For you, O slightly profane student of human nature, the cracked tinkle of the church bell has no attractions; for you, in a mass of human beings all struggling to get the best seats obtainable, and bringing into play the while all the worst passions of our nature which the inconvenience and discomfort of such a crowd are sure to elicit, the melodious utterances of the Rev. Barney O'Brien, the incense of censers, the rainbow hues of cope, chasuble, and stole, the monotone of Gregorians chanted indifferently well, the ogling of tractarian demoiselles, which go to make up the sum total of fashionable devotion, have positively no charm whatever. In a word, when in London you eschew church; in the country, it is a different matter. There the musical chimes, the simple earnestness of the flocking worshippers, the intense reality of the whole proceedings wake feelings which we respect far too profoundly to mention with a context of social levity. But at present you are on duty in town, and there you will remain till the season is fairly

over. What, therefore, we repeat, is the programme of the day?

Be confiding, and let us arrange it for you. Our mail phaeton is waiting at the door—we drive our new bays for the first time, on the principle of the better the day, the better the deed—and if you will, you shall have a seat. Away with the semi-consumed cigar. Light a new one. What, seltzer and curaçoa!—well, judiciously cooled with the ice that comes from the lake of Wenham, there are worse beverages for a thirsty morning: if you must have it, quaff it quickly, for we are due at a little villa in the neighbourhood of Hampstead at 1.30, and 12.45 has just boomed forth from the clock-tower of Westminster. Where are we going? and Who is this peremptory madame, you ask—by the same token she is a mademoiselle—who will admit of no trifling with the facts, and who holds you so inflexibly to the instant of your preconcerted arrangement? Is it a case of the tender passion?—are you merely at large now *en parole*, and simply let go in the fashion of the bird held by a silken string of a wanton maid, "who lets it trip a little from her hand, and then pulls it back again?" Nothing of the sort. Feel our heart. No palpitation there. We are sound in wind and limb. We compose no mournful sonnets to our mistress's eyebrows, simply because mistress we own none. We are going to pay a visit to a very charming young lady, and that is all. You fancy you will be *de trop*? Nothing of the kind. We are wending our way to our

destination—uncomplimentary though the confession may sound—in default of anything better to do. When we are there we shall have no private communications to make. Two, you hint, is company, and three is none? Monstrous mis-statement, lamentably distorted view of the facts. Three is better than two at Thespis Villa, and four or five still better, "provided always," as they say in the House, that the company is judiciously selected, and that its members are capable of making themselves useful as well as ornamental, that they can be agreeable and chatty, that they have a notion of epigram and an idea of repartee, that they are well up in the latest scandals, that they know something of the most recent news, that they are in the world and of it, and that they know exactly where to draw the line between well-bred freedom of manner, and insolent licence of bearing and of tongue.

Thespis Villa, Hampstead, is the abode of pretty, piquant Miss Lavelle. The actress? Exactly so, none other; and we promise you that search as you will throughout the whole vicinage you will not find a residence ordered upon sounder principles of comfort and elegance combined, or a pleasanter place to while away half-an-hour, an hour, or make it even two or three if the means and duties of your exalted station permit, in a pleasant exchange of graceful badinage, refined inanities, and artistic chaff. Miss Lavelle, as you probably know, is not a *tragédienne*. When she is on the stage she neither raves nor rants. Neither Lady Macbeth, nor even Ophelia or Des-

demona come within her range; but she is admitted to make a charming Rosalind, and in light comedy generally —such, for instance, as that contained in those plays which Jack Pungent writes, and which all London goes to see over and over again. She is unique and unapproachable. There is a grace and smoothness in her manner without which her excessive poignancy would almost border upon the acrid; and the fullness and unreservedness of spirit with which she throws herself into any *rôle* that she may happen to be performing, well-nigh converts her dramatic conceptions into realities. At Thespis Villa Miss Lavelle lives under the shadow and protection of a staid duenna, her mother, as is not unusual with ladies in "the profession," having died when she was almost too young to remember her. As we are neither going this Sabbath morn to endeavour to force upon the young lady a comedy which we have written—we leave that kind of thing for our friend Sidney Trialle, whom we have already introduced to the reader of these volumes—nor to bother her on any other matters of business, she is quite certain to be glad to see us. Our visit may culminate—who knows? in a snug little dinner at the 'Star and Garter,' in one of those exquisite rooms which command a view from the garden over the river; or if you like it better, there are things more improbable in this world than that we should telegraph down to the 'Trafalgar,' for a private room, and "whitebait at Greenwich" for four.

This is Thespis Villa. We are punctual to the moment.

We walk in and discover, however, that Miss Lavelle is not. We are ushered into the little drawing-room of the establishment, and while we are waiting for the fair mistress of the place we will survey the apartment. You can tell an actress's drawing-room at once; and it would need but a very few, and those very superficial, glances to inform you immediately who and what the proprietress is of the chamber in which we at present are. The heaps of music strewed promiscuously about, on and by the piano, the pile of Lacey's plays stowed away in the corner, the multitudinous bouquets ranged horizontally on the cheffonier or pointed perpendicularly in those elegant Venetian vases—all there are suggestive to you of the "study" of the conscientious artiste, the fall of the curtain, the enthusiastic "call," the floral avalanche which greets the appearance of the popular favourite, and the modest donations of heart-smitten admirers. Last night, you properly opine, must have been a signal triumph on the part of Miss Lavelle. You are perfectly right: *ecce signum.* If you count, you may see that there are in this little drawing-room no less than a dozen daintily made and delicately fastened bouquets; and six more, hurled at her devoted head at other periods throughout the evening, Miss Lavelle distributed "when the play was o'er" among her sisters in art. Altogether there reigns throughout the apartment an air of graceful *abandon.* There is no cold formality of order—no evidences of that painfully studied symmetry in the arrangements of each article

of furniture and decoration which causes you to feel that when you discompose a chair you are committing an inexpressible sin, or that when you handle a book you are guilty of the great offence. Imagine the exact antithesis to the typical old maid's drawing-room, and you have the actress's. Look at the ornaments on the mantelpiece. The ormolu clock was given Miss Lavelle on the occasion of one of her provincial starring tours; so were most of the other gimcracks scattered about here and there at intervals. Lift up the newspaper upon the table, and what do you find lurking beneath? Yes—can it be?—a box of cigarettes; and as you make the discovery, the notion suggests itself to you that there is just discernible the faintest conceivable suspicion of the perfume of—how gross the word sounds—tobacco adhering to the complex folds of the heavy muslin curtains. But you are taking a mean advantage of the absence of the owner. Perhaps the only thing is that when Miss Lavelle descends herself radiant from her toilette, and invigorated by her boudoir breakfast, she will probably suggest a cigarette to you herself, and will certainly require an extremely insignificant amount of pressure to insert one between her pearly teeth, and emit little spiral wreaths of smoke from her laughing mouth. Yes, it is a fact, Miss Lavelle is in her very small way, a consumer of nicotine, and, what is more, she is not the least ashamed of it.

Beaming with smiles, and rejoiced of course to see you, the actress enters. Very sorry to have kept you waiting;

but the first night of the new piece, commemorated as it subsequently was by a *petit souper* in Jack Pungent's chambers, has not unnaturally been succeeded by an increased demand for beauty sleep. As a rule we must frankly confess that half-an-hour's chat with a popular actress is a good deal better than an hour's; and that a condemnation to a more protracted interview than one extending over the latter space is next door to intolerable. In ninety-nine cases the conversational stock of these ladies is painfully limited and strictly circumscribed by the narrow horizon of self. That is the beginning, middle, and end of all they have to say. If you attempt to divert the current of talk into other channels, they will quickly bring it back again to its original bed; and unless you are a perfect Paganini of panegyric it is hopeless ever to win yourself a place in their good graces. Fortunately Miss Lavelle is an exception to this very objectionable rule. To say that she is not open to an occasional piece of neatly offered adulation, would be to say that she is more than woman. But then the compliment must be nicely turned and antithetically offered, or else she would not give you a rush for it; and whether it be the result of the influence which Jack Pungent's writing has had upon her, or an instance of a purely natural taste, Miss Lavelle has a very pretty idea of epigram.

"Were you at the theatre last night?" asks that lady, with a delightfully unconscious air.

What! did not Miss Lavelle see you duly in your place

in the front row of the *fauteuils*, your seat having been taken a full fortnight beforehand—and did you not flatter yourself that some of those bewitching looks, of which Miss Lavelle is so consummate a mistress, were thrown towards you and intended for you? "Well then," the young lady will inform you, "you were dismally mistaken; for when I am on the stage," adds Miss Lavelle, "I can never see who is in the house; I would not withdraw my attention from my part to recognize an angel, supposing I had been introduced to him ten minutes before."

And here it may be observed that it is a cardinal point with all actresses and most actors to avow to you solemnly that while they are playing, the inspiration which takes possession of their souls so alienates their senses from all surrounding objects, that the world off the stage might as well have no existence for them. In almost every case this is of course a most absurd piece of artistic cant, and even you have your doubts as to the genuineness of Miss Lavelle's assertion on this head, and refer it rather to the extremity of the desire to vindicate the dignity of her art, and the high power of abstraction which it demands, than to any adequate foundation in facts. Accuse an actress of self-consciousness, and you have wounded her feelings in the tenderest and most susceptible point. Hint to her that in such and such a situation she was thinking too much of the expression of her face or the effect of her dress, and she will conceive that she has ever against you an unimpairable ground of quarrel. *Par exemple*, when the critic

of the 'Piccadilly Sweeper' ventured to hint the other day to Miss Figurante, the budding *tragédienne*, that in one or two places there was not noticeable that entire oblivion of self and of the world's external realities which marks the *artiste*, "the eye beholds not but the fancy sees," did you not, when you called upon that lady *à propos* of the five-act drama in which you wished to induce her to appear, find her in a state of ungovernable fury, denouncing the 'Piccadilly' critic as a misjudging dullard or a prejudiced observer? Did she not tell you that the strictures were lies from beginning to end? Did she not assure you that she never did and never could think of herself when she was acting, and that the critique in question was a vile tissue of ridiculous fabrications? Moreover, did she not ask you to confirm her own statements respecting herself, and did you not, to escape an argument and to avoid offence, unhesitatingly and basely assent?

Of course you believe implicitly Miss Lavelle's asseveration. The only thing that causes you some surprise is the manner in which, with true feminine inconsequence, she gives you a highly humorous detailed description of the company in the said stalls, of the variations of facial expression displayed by your neighbours on each side of you, of the eccentricity of the ladies' dresses and the general effect of the gentlemen's noses. You are not rude enough of course to point out the manner in which this extremely amusing and remarkably satirical description militates against the validity of what Miss Lavelle

told you only a minute ago. You overlook the discrepancy, and enjoy the genial sunshine of Miss Lavelle's raillery. An audience criticized by an actor is always worth hearing; when the critic is an actress it is better worth hearing still. Miss Lavelle spares nobody. She makes unpitying fun of the pompous ladies — how these women love one another who were in the boxes; and she turns inside out in the pleasantest fashion conceivable the *epea pteroenta* of comment which reached her ears on the stage from the house in front of her. And here one remark may be made: audiences may not possibly know that every word they say within a tolerable space of the stage is perfectly intelligible to the actors. From the front row of the stalls and from the stage-boxes it is impossible to speak in a tone above a whisper without confiding your thoughts to persons whom presumably you never intended to put in possession of them. This we say merely as a hint. It is a hint, however, which those persons — we refer especially to the young gentlemen who come in from the clubs about the middle of the second act —will do undeniably well to take to heart, and not merely to read but inwardly to digest.

Meanwhile Miss Lavelle espies a small pile of unopened letters which arrived in the course of last evening, and which with your permission she will open. Number one is from a provincial manager. Does Miss Lavelle feel disposed to accept a three weeks' engagement at Mudpool? "Not on those terms," replies the lady in question

soliloquizingly. Number two is from the Managing Committee of the Dramatic Fête. Will Miss Lavelle take a stall? The answer here is negative again: "Not if I know it, and have all the old Indian officers, government-office clerklings, and boys from Oxford and Cambridge staring at me as if they had never seen a woman—much less an actress—before;" which characterization of the demeanour of the visitors who frequent this ineffably snobbish and vulgarizing show possesses the triple merit of pungency, condensation, and truth. Number three is a request that Miss Lavelle will consent to take a part in an afternoon performance which is in contemplation for the benefit of the wife and children of a moderately well-known actor who has recently been struck down with sudden disease There is no hesitation in the answer returned for this. You would as soon find Miss Lavelle cutting off her right hand, or denuding her head of those long silky locks, over which half the young men of London go wild, as refusing to do all in her power towards lending a helping hand to some brother or sister in distress. Number four is from a gentleman who is well known in the metropolis as that of a man who is never satisfied unless he has just taken in hand some new theatrical speculation, and who is ready to waste every farthing of money on which he can lay hands in some absolutely impossible dramatic enterprise. The note which Miss Lavelle has just opened from him contains an offer to join a company which he proposes to form for a new theatre

that he is about to open somewhere near Chancery Lane—"a highly convenient situation for him, I should say," remarks Miss Lavelle on coming to this point of his communication; "I believe it is not very far from there to Bream's Buildings, Whitecross Prison, and Basinghall Street,"—and also a notification to the fact that he will "call to-morrow (Sunday) afternoon about four o'clock, if Miss Lavelle will see him then." "You may call," remarks the young lady who is the object of this inquiry, "but Miss Lavelle most certainly will *not* see you. How I do loathe and detest that man?"

Meanwhile the afternoon wears away, and Miss Lavelle suggests something not wholly unconnected with the idea of lunch. "Desborough Ranger," an old friend, she tells you, "has been good enough to send me a magnificent *pâté de foie gras*, one of two or three which he has just received from some foreign magnate or other—one of those emperors or kings with whom he is always hobnobbing when he goes on one of his Captain Cooke's voyages round the world. "I *do* like Desborough," she continues; "in my opinion he is far and away the cleverest newspaper writer in London. He is certainly the only critic in London for whose opinion I would give *that*"—and Miss Lavelle contemptuously snaps a very pretty pair of not too heavily be-ringed and be-jewelled fingers. "What utter pretenders," continues this outspoken young lady, "what intense humbugs, what venal scribes, and mercenary flatterers nine-tenths of those snobs are who do the theatrical

notices for the morning papers!" This is an opinion which Miss Lavelle would not probably care about expressing in a mixed company; but as it has never been either your or our misfortune to "do a theatrical notice for the morning papers," she knows that she may state without fear her real opinion on the subject.

We discuss the *pâté*—a little company of four, for Mrs. Dulcinea, Miss Lavelle's *duenna*, has made her appearance. The speculative theatrical amateur calls, is sent away, and sulkily retires. One or two other admirers of Miss Lavelle knock, but are not admitted. "Dressing to go out, Johnson," says that young lady as the reply which her maid is to give. We are told that if we behave ourselves with scrupulous exactness, we may venture to ignite our cigars even in Miss Lavelle's drawing-room—her own special sanctum. The guarantee is given and the privilege utilized. Miss Lavelle enjoys a cigarette, and entertains us with autobiographical anecdotes—tells us of the anonymous jewellery which is sent her—of the mysteriously passionate love epistles which she habitually receives—of the silly sonnets, and the unmelodious rhymes. It is five o'clock now. "How time flies!" we remark. "Of course it does when you are here," we are told. Once again we ask, What is the programme? Does not Mrs. Dulcinea think that a little country air would do her charge good after the week's work? Certainly.

Shall it be Richmond? that is the main point. Where else could the air be fresher or the dinner better? And

to make a fourth, as Mrs. Dulcinea will not go, Miss Lavelle suggests that we should take the married lady who personated her mamma in the dramatic entertainment of last night. Then our hospitality will be extended, and the proprieties will not be outraged. Richmond it is; and though May is just yielding to the embrace of June, we still realize from our dining-room at the 'Star and Garter' the delicious description which a contemporary versifier has given of the beauties of that month by the king of English streams.

> "May on the river! verily fill a
> Bumper to honour her—who condemns?
> Dining at eve in a pleasant villa,
> While wit and poetry's rarest gems
> Aid the exquisite wine's swift sparkle,
> And under the oak-trees patriarchal
> We watch the swans their young flotilla
> Piloting home over sinuous Thames."

But Miss Lavelle's is not the only kind of drawing-room histrionic to be met with. The varieties of the class are innumerable. It will be sufficient if we give one more instance here. The scene is St. John's Wood, an elegant villa, the windows of whose *salon* open on a pretty lawn. There is something which strikes you as eminently continental in the general atmosphere of the apartment. Nor is it surprising, for the fair temporary proprietress of the premises is none other than the celebrated French actress in *Opera Buffe*, Mademoiselle Dupin. The theatrical career of this lady has been as eventful as it has been long, and that is saying a good deal, for Mademoiselle—

shall we be ungallant enough to divulge the fact?—is fast verging on the fifties. But age has no power, in the opinion of the young men who worship her, to wither her charms; and the mere fact that her beauty is, to say the least of it, so ripe, and of such well-established standing, causes her to be more run after than ever. How is it that while the bloom of freshness is what men theoretically admire most in a woman, no woman in the position of Mademoiselle Dupin can be said to be a success till she has entirely lost all trace of that bewitching quality? Is not this feature in the popular taste significant of a grossly morbid fancy? Twenty years ago, when Mademoiselle, possessed of an elegant figure, a freshly piquant face, and a delicate flexible voice, came over to England she was passed by unnoticed; now that she comes here, her better days over, old and worn, these English to use her own language, "they cannot be too kind to her." "*Mon Dieu,*" as the lady in question remarks, "*mais c'est drôle.*" And while we are lingering in Mademoiselle Dupin's drawing-room there is heard a succession of knocks at the door; the Earl of Rattleborough is announced, then the Hon. Percy Loosefyshe, and so on till Mademoiselle has quite a *levée.* Well, there is no denying the fact that Mademoiselle's power of facial expression, play of feature and of eye, is considerable, but notwithstanding this, we question whether popularity with the above-named gentlemen can be said to be a healthy symptom in the taste of the *jeunesse dorée* of the period.

CHAPTER X.

RECEPTIONS: THEIR SIGNIFICANCE AND POPULARITY.

The tyranny of fashion — Major, Mrs., and the Miss Scrapers at home — Social hypocrisies — Theory of political receptions — Views of Mr. Disraeli on this point examined — Functions of receptions — A reception at the new Foreign Office.

WHEN the philosopher of the *Republic* drew his graphic sketch of the tyranny exercised over men and states by the many-headed beast—more generally known as popular opinion—he was probably without any prophetic foreknowledge and warning as to the particular phase which this despotism would assume in the times that were to come. Had he been able to peer through the mist of ages, and thus to form an approximate estimate of the various forces by which our modern society is swayed, he would have seen that the imperious tyrant to which we all of us bow the knee, the moral Juggernaut of the nineteenth century, is summed up in the one word,—Fashion. Fashion is in truth our one autocratic and irresponsible despot; no constitutional monarch, with limited powers, anxious therefore to preserve a place in the hearts of his subjects; but an imperious sovereign who will be omnipotent, whose rule is that of fear, rather than love; and who, as a result,

has to receive the homage of hypocrisy, where the homage that springs from genuine and loyal affection is not forthcoming.

The extent to which this reluctant devotion, this mere lip-service, this double-dyed duplicity of allegiance—merely because allegiance of some sort is exacted, genuine or spurious—are carried, is simply astounding. England a free country! Never was there a more monstrous untruth conceived in sentiment or propounded in language. "Britons never will be slaves." Bah! the boast carries with it its own refutation. Let us convert these commonplaces, and then we may hope to arrive at something like truth. England it is which is the chosen home of social servitude—the blustering Briton, her special victim. The more subtle the slavery, the more deep-seated its root. It is all very well for Octavius Blogg, Esq., to suffer his indignation to kindle over the accounts which he reads in his newspapers of the remorseless censorship exercised over the Continental press, and to slap his knees, half in an ecstacy of pleasure, half in a paroxysm of wrath, with the exclamation, "Thank God, this is a free country!" My dear Blogg, reflect for a moment, and you will find it is nothing of the sort. It is not free for us, and it is certainly not free for you. Answer, are you free to live the life you choose, to order your downgoings and uprisings as your own fancy would dictate; to do what you like, to dress as you like, to snap your fingers in the world's face, and bid decorum go hang? Dare you, Blogg, in the

face of Mrs. Blogg, ask in your friends to cut their homely mutton with you, just as you would cut it *solus*, without trimmings in the shape of an elaborate *menu*, and a hired waiter for the occasion? The thing is impossible. "The idea of it," ejaculates Mrs. B., at the bare mention of such a proposition, "What would the Thompsons think?" What would the Thompsons think? That accursed question strikes the key-note of the tyranny of your existence. Yes, Blogg, you, in company with your countrymen, have set up, for the purposes of your own special idolization, two images, making up the dualism of your social godhead: one is Fashion, the other is Respectability. Hate them as you may; vow to escape their influence, as you very likely will; positively refuse them one single tribute of obedience, as it is conceivable you may be bold enough to do; the hatred is ineffective, the escape impossible, the refusal an idle boast.

Time, August: scene, Eastbourne Gardens, Tyburnia. You pass rows of houses; they present each one of them the same picture of the abomination of desolation. The shutters are carefully closed, with a stratum of newspaper interposed between the plate-glass and the panel of imitation maple. Call at number 300, the Scrapers' house. At the sound of the knocker, and the jangle of the bell, a menial with dishevelled hair and discomfited dress, obtrudes her head up the area steps. "Family all out of town, sir." Will they soon return? "Very uncertain indeed when, sir." Number 300, from top to

bottom, from garret to basement, all over, within and without, is the architectural embodiment of a lie. The Scrapers are as much out of town as you are at Hong Kong. Look on this picture and on that. Glance first at the deserted aspect of the drawing-room windows, and the feigned semblance of desolation which the exterior of the dining-salon has been taught to wear. If you were to obtain a sectional view of the mansion, if you could see through one or two brick walls, you would meet with a very different sight. Inside, in the back drawing-room sits Mrs. Scraper, with her two daughters, mentally anathematizing their destiny, and endeavouring to beguile the monotomy of their incarceration with those novels which ought to be read beneath the cliffs of Scarborough, or to the somnolent accompaniment of the waves rippling up the Biarritz beach. Major Scraper has had a very severe loss in the failure of the Joint Stock Bungalore Banking Company, and you might just as well ask him to quit London and remove his family to the seaside, as challenge the paralytic cripple to a foot-race from here to York. But Mrs. Scraper persists in simulating the appearance, if she cannot enjoy the reality. Her neighbours have shut up their houses, and taken flight; she shuts up her house, and remains. She is not even a prisoner on parole, save possibly when she steals out fitfully beneath the glimpses of the moon, accompanied by her two daughters to get only a mouthful of the fresh air. Society issues its mandate: quit your house in

London. Mrs. Scraper accords the best apology for obedience she can.

In the name of common sense, what is the practical effect of this unblushing delusion, this gigantic sham, this falsehood, that is acted out with such painful elaborateness and at such infinite trouble? Does Mrs. Scraper absolutely believe that for a moment her neighbours are taken in by the stratagem, that the thing goes down an instant with the Joneses or the Smiths, and the Browns, who live within a stone-throw from number 300. Mrs. Scraper, in her way, is a clever woman. Her matrimonial tactics on her daughters' behalf display a considerable amount of ability of a certain kind, and she exercises an unusual degree of shrewdness in her nice distinctions between the various gradations of age and prospects of the young men who haunt her drawing-room during the London season. Far-seeing, therefore, as in most matters she is, how comes it that in this particular she is so fatuously short-sighted? Is it seriously possible she should believe that the wretched deceit which she practices, in reality deceives anybody? Does she not know that those persistent purveyors of gossip, the tradesmen's boys who call for orders at her house, are perfectly well aware how much the family is out of town; that those ubiquitous and inquisitive little urchins take a malicious pleasure in making fun of her efforts at fashion and respectability; that the very first thing they do when they proceed to the house of Mrs. Scraper's great social rivals, the Swigsbies, just round the

corner, is to tell the whole story of how number 300 "shuts itself up in the back drawing-room, and then says it is in the country." It is bad enough, in all conscience, to be condemned to pass August under any circumstances in London, but if that sentence of grievous condemnation be absolutely inevitable, by every means in our power let us make the burden of our punishment as light as may be. There is even in the Metropolis, with its wealth of parks and pleasure-grounds, inside and outside its walls, city or suburban, much that may beguile you of your imprisonment, that may, if only you can give the reins to a tolerably vivid imagination, make you for a few moments, or even hours, believe that you have left the town far behind you, and that you have exchanged the *fumum strepitumque Romæ*, for the placid delights of some remote rural paradise.

Social hypocrisy is, as we have already observed, the inevitable result of the sweeping tyranny of fashion. It meets us at every corner. The persistent industry with which the palate is taught to overcome its natural prejudices, and to imbibe a taste for olives, is after all but symbolical of the artificial effort, by dint of which the modern world gradually learns to regard certain laborious undertakings in the light of pleasures, or at least of social duties, which cannot be foregone. The present exaltation of opera in England, as a species of refined amusement, is as fair an illustration of the tendency as we could have. Far be it from us to deny that, out of the hundreds who

nightly flock to Covent Garden, when the season is at its height, there are many to whom the amusement thus provided is one of the purest and intensest that there could be. But for one votary of real enjoyment, how many martyrs are there to fashionable usage, to whom the two or three hours spent in listening to the subtle melodies of 'Les Huguenots' or 'Il Flauto Magico' are nothing but—were they only bold enough to avow the fact—the most utter boredom? Society, however, it is generally considered, requires attendance at the opera, as the complement of a polite training; and thus a harmonious martyrdom is regarded in instances innumerable as the test of *ton*.

We are disposed, however, to think that the most perfect and considerable illustration of the triumph of the social tyrant over the sense of human comfort and enjoyment is to be found in that institution which we propose mainly to treat of in this chapter, and which has acquired the name of "receptions." That these assemblages are entirely in accordance with what it is fashionable to term "the spirit of the age" must frankly be confessed. They are illimitably pretentious, absurdly ambitious, ostentatious to the last degree, and unsatisfactory in each separate particular. The one art whose study they involve seems to be the compression of a maximum of human beings into a minimum of space; the one end which they have in view, the greatest possible discomfort of the greatest possible number. For all purposes of social intercourse they are

practically useless. A vast crowd of animate nature kept in a condition of ceaseless locomotion, an unending series of hurried salutes, a prodigious amount of treading on toes and tearing of gorgeous skirts, a marvellous deal of well-bred strife in the matter of standing-room; now and again a general rush to that end or corner of the apartment in which the lion of the evening has made his appearance, culminating in a sharply contested but abortive struggle to obtain a commanding view of the celebrity; general disappointment, heat, and noise,—these are the most marked characteristics of the receptions of the period.

There are of course receptions, and receptions. We have spoken of those usually to be found in the average drawing-rooms of the metropolis. The reception in its original conception was, and even now in some instances of its development is, a perfectly legitimate form of entertainment; but in such cases there are certain conditions of size and area in the apartments thrown open which are invariably realized. Ministerial and political receptions generally, for instance, were originated for the accomplishment of a definite and intelligible end, and are held in drawing-rooms of adequate dimensions. When a Minister throws open the *salons* of his official residence, you may be pretty sure of not being inconveniently pressed either as regards elbow or standing room. How far these assemblages ever absolutely fulfilled, or are ever likely to be able to fulfil, the entire purpose for which

they were originated is another question, and one which requires some amount of special consideration.

The object proposed is simple enough. In England, from the very peculiarities of our national life, politics have always been amenable to social influences. Society, in a word, has reacted upon politics just as politics have upon society. It has been impossible to detach the one from the other. We have a wholesome horror of nebulous recluses who elaborate theories of government, which will not stand the test of daylight, in the lettered obscurity of their study. If a man aspires to the task of swaying and directing his fellow-men, we regard it as an indisputable axiom that he should first make himself acquainted with their ways of thought and habits of action. Thus the truth has always been recognized, that social popularity is the most valuable adjunct to political influence. Once establish a social prestige, once acquire the reputation of an adept in the arts of entertainment, and you have laid the foundation-stone of importance in state matters, should your ambition incline you to take part in these. There is no more common objection brought against Mr. Disraeli than that which is summed up in the words—he does not understand the English people, and he has never thoroughly appreciated at their true weight the varied conditions of English life. Now, seeing that this criticism is invariably associated with a certain degree of political significance, it is difficult to see its true purport or real meaning; for the author of 'Sibyl' has at least done what

no writer in the language, previous or subsequent, has achieved, in the singularly acute manner in which he has caught hold of the various points of contact between English social and political life, has weighed exactly the various component parts of each, and has illustrated with marvellous felicity the constant reaction of the two. For comprehensive observation on all these points, for thorough mastery of all their details, and for intense truthfulness of exposition, the novel which we have mentioned stands alone in English literature. It has been suggested to us here by the theme which we have before us in the fruitful field of receptions.

How far, we just asked, have these really accomplished their mission? How far may it be considered that the casual card which a prominent politician, or a prominent politician's wife, sends to the family of some one of his political partizans, effects the purpose with which it is issued, confirms the spirit, or extends the degree of political allegiance? Are votes won by off-hand invitations? If a Minister wishes to carry a division, is an infallible means to this end to be found in a suggestion to his wife that she should give an evening, and, without a moment's delay, she should straightway lavish broadcast upon the whole rank and file of his parliamentary supporters, intimations that the company of themselves, their wives, and children, will be considered a special honour? In a word, is this a kind of bait which takes, and can the studied condescension of a few minutes atone for the

systematic snubbing of a season? Is the *entrée* of a distinguished *salon* upon rare occasions valued so highly by those who represent the nation in Parliament, that they should select the lobby into which they go, accordingly?

"People"—remarks Lady St. Julian, in 'Sibyl,' who, to secure for her party the vote of a revolutionary Whig, Mr. Trenchard, has just announced her intention of sending to him "a card for Wednesday," and is accordingly overwhelmed by the commensurate vastness of her idea and her sacrifice—"get into Parliament to get on; their aims are indefinite. If they have indulged in hallucinations about place before they enter the House, they are soon freed from such distempered fancies; they find they have no more talent than other people, and if they had, they learn that power, patronage, and pay, are reserved for us and our friends. Well, then, like practical men, they look to some result, and they get it. They are asked out to dinner more than they would be; they move rigmarole resolutions at nonsensical public meetings; and they get invited with their women to assemblies at their leader's, where they see stars, and blue ribbons, and, above all, us, who they little think in appearing on such occasions make the greatest conceivable sacrifice. Well, then, of course such people are entirely in one's power if one only had time and inclination to notice them. You can do anything with them. Ask them to a ball, and they will give you their votes; invite them to a dinner, and, if necessary, they will rescind them; but cultivate them,

remember their wives at assemblies, and call their daughters, if possible, by their right names, and they will not only change their principles or desert their party for you, but subscribe their fortunes if necessary, and lay down their lives in your service."

Cynical as this view is, it has the merit of sincerity. It is nothing more nor less, without a particle of exaggeration, than the creed which is conscientiously held by a large section of people. 'Sibyl' was published nearly a quarter of a century since, but the shrewd insight of the work is as applicable now, and as correct in its conclusions as it was then, merely because the phenomena upon which it was employed have experienced no material alteration. Mr. Disraeli, however, a true artist, and a genuine philosopher, has not failed to place in juxtaposition with the criticism of Lady St. Julians, the comments of another spectator, who takes a more serious view of the profession of politics, and a less weighty one of the influences of society.

"Ay," is the response of Egremont to her contemptuously aristocratic ladyship, "there is a great question for you to ponder over. This is a lesson for you fine ladies who think you can govern the world by what you call your social influences: asking people once or twice a-year to an inconvenient crowd in your house; now haughtily smirking, and now incontinently staring at them; and flattering yourselves all this time that to have the occasional privilege of entering your *salons*, and the periodical

experience of your insolent recognition, is to be a reward for great exertions, or, if necessary, an inducement to infamous tergiversation."

It would be impossible to have the two opposite points of view summed up more succinctly or placed in more emphatic contrast; equally impossible would it be to have selected a more appropriate text for any remarks that we may have to make on the subject of the political influence of drawing-rooms. If in the days when 'Sybil' was written, admission to society, and to the *salons* of such ladies as the Countess St. Julians, was the main object with which a serious proportion of members of the Lower House aspire to a seat in Parliament, the truth might be considered to hold doubly good in the present day. The immense influx of wealth that has taken place during the last few years, the increased expense of being returned for county or borough, the tremendous accession of *novi homines* to St. Stephen's, the exaggerated social ambitions which pervade the various classes of the community—all point in this direction. Equally undeniable is it that to be able to write the letters M.P. after your name is a kind of talismanic power endued with an *Open sesame* influence upon the closed doors of society. Once achieve the dignity of a full-fledged senator, and you ascend *per saltum* an infinite number of degrees in the social scale. The patronage of your wife and daughter is besought for local bazaars, charity balls, and county hospital conversaziones. You yourself are pestered with

letters from applicants for anything and everything which you may ever have it in your power, directly or indirectly, to bestow upon anybody. All this may be highly gratifying to your love of power, and your sense of importance. It is pleasant, too, doubtless, to receive invitations to *réunions*, receptions, balls, and dinners at which hitherto you were a complete stranger.

And that the senatorial rank does confer each and all of these benefits on its possessor there is just as little doubt as there is that it is as much now as it was in the days when Mr. Disraeli first penned the novel from which we have so freely quoted, the object of a considerable number of men who enter Parliament to achieve an accession of social dignity. It is as true now as it was then that the introduction of their wives and daughters into a higher circle of society than that which they would otherwise enter, is an effective motive-power with a serious proportion of gentlemen who enter the running on the eve of each new election. Feminine nature has not changed, in any material respects, from what it was a quarter of a century since: nor has any fresh limitation been imposed upon the circle of feminine ambitions. But there are certain conditions which have changed; there are certain essential revolutions which have been effected in society, and the fact of which tends very materially to alter the social and political aspects of those receptions to which we have alluded. The movement towards the equalization of classes within a certain area of society is one of

the most striking phenomena of the last few years. We have made very great progress in the removal of certain social disabilities, so to speak, which, when 'Sibyl' first saw the light, were actively and keenly felt. Subject to certain limitations, a kind of levelling process has been going on very surely indeed: and, paradoxical as it may seem, it is precisely because it has been levelling that it has not been revolutionary. The aristocracy of England—and to all who value a national aristocracy the fact must seem highly thankworthy—no longer occupies the position which at the opening of the century, or even twenty-five years after the century was inaugurated, it did. It has entirely renounced, as a body, its position of exclusiveness. Wisely and well it has flung itself into the current of the times. With admirable tact and singular courage it has willingly and at once recognized how vastly changed the present conditions of society are from those which once prevailed. It has not been blind to the growth of the great middle class: it has acknowledged and accepted it. It has ceased to regard all matrimonial alliances save those contracted within the limited circle of its own corporation, as impolitic and undignified; and thus, by making certain wise concessions on the subject of caste, it has materially increased its own intrinsic strength: it has extended the sphere of its influence, and thus of that influence it has multiplied tenfold the beneficial results. The consequence, therefore, is that instead of being —as it certainly would have been were it not for this

judiciously generous view which it has taken of its position —a mere isolated stronghold, the aristocracy of England is a citadel of national strength, connected with innumerable outposts, which defy conquest and repel attack. The aristocratic sentiment has become infinitely more widely diffused than it ever was before, simply because the pale of its interests has been extended and the field of its sympathies enlarged.

This great fact is, as might have been expected, the parent of innumerable results of major or minor importance. One of these is assuredly to be witnessed in the marvellous alteration of sentiment on the part of the high-born holders of receptions and the like, from that by which they were animated in the days of Lady St. Julians. There has ceased to be, to any great extent, with these noble dames a feeling that if they invite to their periodical gatherings the wife and daughters of a member of Parliament whose profession is that of a north-country manufacturer, they are thus laying the husband under any corresponding political obligation. The invitation card is no doubt hailed by its recipients with quite as much satisfaction as it ever could have been: the only thing is that the terms on which it was issued, if not accepted, have almost wholly disappeared. Of course so long as politics and women are co-existent, there will continue to be drawing-room influence in state matters, and it will be impossible to conduct a general election, or to accomplish a Parliamentary division without a certain

modicum of accompaniments in the way of feminine intrigue. So long as there are drawing-rooms there will be political drawing-rooms, just as, so long as there are women, there will be women whose proclivities are political too. The broad truth which we desire to point out is this, that in proportion as the validity of public ties has increased, private influences have lost their hold; and that the binding power of party is now a force separate and distinct from—notwithstanding that in the first place it may have been to a certain extent formed by—the backstair agencies of receptions and saloons. It must be remembered that if, on the one hand, there appears to be a tendency towards the monopoly of the House of Commons by the moneyed classes of the community, there is also, on the other hand, unmistakably growing up amongst us and increasing in power and volume day by day a political conscience, and that the spirit of political life, *pur et simple*, dissociated from all social incumbrances, is increasingly acquiring a motive force.

Such being the respects in which the receptions of the present day differ from those with whose features the pen of England's most brilliant and far-seeing political novelist has made us familiar, what can be really said to constitute the material advantages by which they are attended? As we have stated elsewhere that the drawing-room is the natural supplement to the club, just as the club would be grievously imcomplete without the drawing-room, so here may we venture to remark that these political *salons* do

but finish the work which the Carlton or Reform, as the case may be, has begun. The best guarantee of political unity is social unity; and if it is a great thing for men to meet each at their ease on the common ground of their club smoking-room, it is a still greater thing for them to possess a place not merely of individual but of periodical family rendezvous. The social elements which the club lacks, the drawing-room supplies.

Thus far we have been disposed to regard receptions as somewhat limited in the composition of their company, and as relying for the guests who charm with their brilliance or enliven with their wit, on the contracted field of political uniformity and agreement. But these receptions without being divested of their political interest, are capable of being rendered subservient to a still broader end; and by effecting the reunion, as they often do, of men who differ widely from each other on every conceivable topic of public interest, they may, and not unseldom do, contribute much towards softening down the asperities of political life. In this respect they are at least true to what we represented at the commencement of this portion of our work as one of the ideal functions of the drawing-room.

And, notwithstanding that of all the social nuisances on the face of the earth, the ordinary reception is undeniably entitled to rank as the greatest, a reception of that kind. which we have now in our eye presents as brilliant a scene as one could wish to see. The rooms are spacious, and if

the company is large there is nothing like an inconvenient crowd. Among the assembly met together here to-night you may distinguish, if you have a good eye for likenesses, all the greatest political characters of the day, many of the most notable celebrities in art, science, and literature, at least two of the most illustrious diplomatists in Europe, and a host of women and men, the representatives of all that is most beautiful and noble in our land. The light from the chandelier is thrown back from the gleam of jewels and the flash of diamonds: there is a murmur of subdued talk running round the rooms, there is plenty of gossip, there is something of scandal. On your left there you may notice the French and the Russian ambassadors, and there a little farther down is a cluster of young *attachés* who have just struggled into the room, not to miss what is pre-eminently *the* reception of the season. Dress-coats are illuminated with every possible variation of orders, and the red of the military uniform is an admirable contrast to the monotonous black of the civilian. Presently the murmur of conversation on a sudden subsides, and from the farther room rings forth bewitchingly sweet and clear the loveliest of Italian melodies, sung by the loveliest voice in London. And so the evening wears away. Politicians interchange confidences, or barter speculations; ladies cross-question diplomatists; there is a restless passing to and fro, and then as midnight comes carriages arrive and the guests disperse.

As we have said, there is a *raison d'être* for receptions

such as these. They have a definite purpose to fulfil and they fulfil it; but the average reception is quite a different thing. The size and number of the rooms devoted to it entirely preclude the possibility of locomotion, or the exchange of social comments. You make your way, in a stifling atmosphere, into the midst of a crowd, and there you are condemned to stop. If there is music, you cannot hear it, and if there is any one whom you particularly want to see, vision is out of the question. And it was to be present at this—this anomalous species of entertainment, which is carefully sheared of everything that could constitute an attraction—that you have left the snug corner at the club, the tranquillity of your own chambers, or possibly the pleasing society of the drawing-room at the house at which you have been dining. This is one of the worst consequences of the extravagant proportions which the reception system has attained—it breaks up many an agreeable dinner-party prematurely and ill-advisedly. So far does its vicious influence go, that even those who have no such engagement on their hands, consider that the prevalence of the entertainment necessitates the simulation of one.

CHAPTER XI.

DRAWING-ROOM CRUSHES.

Advantages of studying Human Nature *en masse* — Kettledrums — There are Kettledrums and Kettledrums — Dinner at Richmond — Happy (?) Thought — Lady Tyghtefytte's Ball — First crush of the season — Miss Tracy — Recuperative power of fashionable butterflies — Mrs. Golightly, &c. — Miss Semperton — Chaperons: Are they to be abolished?

DRYDEN was in the habit of saying that to form an adequate notion of human nature it should be contemplated *en masse*. It is certainly true that there is nothing like a crowd, whether it be in the streets or in the drawing-room, for bringing out into startling relief all those features and passions of humanity which at times of less severe trial may remain unnoticed or hidden. It is one thing to be patient and submissive after a long schooling of adversity; it is quite another thing to display these virtues when one is pressed in the matter of elbow-room. We have heard of the long-suffering endurance of Job; but the patriarch was never driven to undergo the terrible ordeal of a London drawing-room in the height of the season.

The passion for crowding and the thirst for crushes seem to increase precisely in proportion as the realities

themselves are multiplied. As if there did not already exist a sufficiency of pretexts for penning up a maximum of human beings in a minimum of space, we have of late years called into vogue a comparatively novel occasion for cramming drawing-rooms to stifling-point, and pursuing human beings even to the verge of suffocation. Balls, receptions, evening parties—these were not enough: we have celebrated a new invention—that of the kettle-drum. We may as well say at the outset that we have not the slightest sympathy with this particular phase of so-called hospitality. It entirely fails to fulfil any of those objects which may conceivably be attained by the evening assemblage or the midnight ball. The garish splendour of the day not merely intensifies the heat of the over-populated apartments, but renders that stealthy seclusion, those furtive flirtations on staircases and in improvised conservatories altogether out of the question. What might be done beneath the gleam of wax-lights and under the inspiration of the recently-concluded waltz is altogether out of the question when the sun is pouring down his rays full in your countenance, and the only incentives to a declaration of passion are to be found in turning over the pages of a photographic album, or in drinking pigmy draughts of tea from a miniature cup of antique china. You meet your friends, of course; but so you would, and with infinitely greater pleasure and convenience to yourself, in the Park, the Botanical Gardens, or even Pall Mall. And even as it is, you will

probably get wedged in between a couple of tables, or a sofa and a lounge, in a manner which renders it a blank impossibility for you to move, so that your interview with your acquaintances will have to be conducted at a distance and through the medium of helpless gestures rather than of actual speech.

Naturally there are kettledrums and kettledrums. We have alluded to the ordinary entertainment which this term designates. The exceptional ones are those which are held under widely different auspices. There is the kettledrum of the town house, such as we have described, and there is the kettledrum of the suburban villa. In the latter case all the conditions are altered. The word no longer implies one or two rooms strained to the utmost limit of their extension with a heterogeneous mass of human beings,—no longer involves the reality of fashionable incarceration. A delightful vision arises to our eyes of spacious rooms opening on delightful lawns, of lawns sloping down to the sinuous Thames, of the Thames flecked with stately swans and overshadowed by giant trees. In a word, the misery of the kettledrum is merged in the bliss of the garden-party. There is no question here of inconvenient crowding, and a mortifying publicity from which escape is impossible. Through these pleasant grounds you are free to wander as and where you will. If you desire any of the interchange of confidences which is the first step of flirtation, you can have them. The scene is suggestive and inspiring. An

opportunity for admiring the beauties of nature will give you countless occasions for the bestowal of as many neatly-turned compliments as you like on the fair companion of your walk. Given only a largesse of sunshine and a sky flecked by as few clouds as possible—if these conditions are not realized, you may be apt to take a gloomy view of affairs—and *réunions* of this description are as charming as anything could well be. But, we repeat, this is the kettledrum extraordinary, or rather the garden-party proper.

The drawing-room crush, correctly speaking, is but a synonym for the private ball. Hitherto our visits to the *salon* have not introduced us to it in any of these aspects. Once for all, let us take a typical instance of these crushes. Let us suppose that the period of Lent has passed, and that the devotee of fashion is on duty once more. The season has come; and there awaits one an ordeal of three months' fever of fashionable dissipation. It will be the usual thing, of course. What man has done, that man will do again. The programme of the opera may be changed; that of the season is the same. Humanity moves in circles. Pegtops and crinolines have given place to inexpressibles tight-fitting as gloves, and skirts looped *en panier;* we have the Row crowded, and the Mile crammed; we have garden-parties at Twickenham, given by dukes of the Royal blood; exhibitions of feminine beauty; and, incidentally, floricultural perfection at the botanical; dinners *un grand sérieux;* ball-rooms

that might contain, with a modicum of comfort, and the possibility of saltatory locomotion, eighty, forced into being receptacles for three hundred. And this is the way in which we are compelled to take our pleasure. Is there not a certain irony in the situation? Is there not a deity who might be christened the Nemesis of fashion?

Dinner at Richmond. Well, after all, under these circumstances, one can reconcile oneself to the boredom of existence. As one sits here, watching the twilight fade into darkness, sipping the exquisite Larose, the window-sash flung high open, and the breeze mounting from the river, whispering that summer is near, talking with your friend a good deal, soliloquizing more, discussing poetry and scandal, metaphysics and opera, till the claret suggests coffee, and the coffee a return to the claret, one positively begins dimly to realize the notion that life may be a positive pleasure. Bah, 'tis a mistake: the waiter brings in candles: candles dispel one's oblivion of actualities, and shatter into atoms the crystal fabric of one's dreams. A thought has struck you: you take out your ivory tablets: you will note it down—some day—who knows?—you will develop it into an epic, or elaborate it in a novel. But there is an entry made already which stares you full in the face: "April the —, Lady Tyghtefytte's ball." Heavens, this is the day! Nine o'clock now: no time to be lost: an angel with hair of gold and eyes of blue has extracted from you a solemn promise that you would have

the second waltz with her: fortunately, her tresses are not the only gold she owns: our friend Abednego is on your traces, and you have had a run of ill-luck lately, which calls for a *coup*. This is the position of affairs: these the reasons which impel you with accents of regret to say, "Waiter, the bill; and have the bays brought round." The bouquet of the wine floats through your head, and in ninety minutes exactly—your evening costume donned at your chambers in town—your brougham has deposited you at the Countess of Tyghtefytte's hall-door.

'Tis the first crush of the new season: Lady Tyghtefytte has, or fancies she has, a species of prescriptive right in the world of fashion, to inaugurate the annual round of dances and balls. The whole affair partakes of the nature of a preliminary canter: if you are to do anything in the season, you must be there. Ye powers, what intriguing has there not been for cards of invitation! Mrs. Quiverfulle is there with her four daughters, and she is elate with exultation. For a young lady to have been at Lady Tyghtefytte's first night is to have already achieved a position, and to have before her a career. A crush indeed. Does her ladyship fancy that the walls of her mansion have an elastic element in their nature? A fearful business this "getting upstairs:" treading of heels, tearing of dresses, words of soft apology, thoughts of bitter execration; and then, when the summit is gained, there is a look of disappointment and anguish on more than one blooming young face. Look at that

child there—she is a new importation from the country—with a freshness and radiance of loveliness that you only see in the *débutante.* She has dreamed for days and nights of Lady Tyghtefytte's—'tis her first ball. Look at her again: you may almost detect tears of mortification in her liquid hazel eyes. She hangs on her father's arm; and her father, the Hon. Peregrine Tracy, M.P., a hot politician, and mad on the Irish Church, has stayed precisely two hours later at "that horrid House" than he pledged his paternal honour to his daughter to do. Mr. Tracy, who is a widower, would not hear of the young lady's going under the escort of Lady Rowena, but insisted on taking her himself. The consequence is, that Miss Tracy stands now at the entrance to the ball-room, like the Peri disconsolate at the gate of heaven. Fear not, *ma belle.* You will enter immediately; time is on your side: in ten minutes your card will be full, and to-night, or rather to-morrow morning, you shall fall asleep full of the delicious conviction that your first appearance at Lady Tyghtefytte's has been a genuine success.

Who are there here? We (our waltz with the golden-haired angel is over) will for a few moments personate the parts of wall-flowers, and, stationing ourselves in the recess, comprehensively survey the situation. The oft-repeated story: old favourites and new beauties, and, on our veracity, judging from the appearance which Lady Tyghtefytte's presents to-night, the London season of

18— is likely to be richer than most of its predecessors in feminine loveliness. "Deuced pretty lot of fillies entered for the running," whispers in our ear that incorrigible turf devotee Frank Playter. We abominate the expression, but we perfectly acquiesce in the sentiment. Who are there here? Who are there not here? Miraculous is the recuperative power of certain butterflies of fashion. We have had a glimpse of the new beauties: we will look at the old favourites. Time is a gracious god: so said the Greek poet, and the Greek poet was right. It is time which heals wounds of body and sorrow of mind. Talk of broken hearts—the being that is blighted at the end of one season is redecorated with an amplitude of bloom at the commencement of the next. Do you remember how little Woppington arrived almost at the verge of suicide after Clara Deline jilted him; how he announced to his friends that he should eschew the world, quit London, and join the Austrian service? Yet here he is, flying past us, as he twirls pretty little Mrs. Figurante round in the waltz, whole-hearted as ever. Well, though we prate lightly of such things, we have had our *mauvais quart d'heure*, and felt it most acutely too; but bah! one must keep his place in this world, though perhaps he moves through it somewhat hipped.

Or look yonder. You have not forgotten the scandal which there was last July touching Mrs. Golightly and Young Mirabel, of the French Legation; how it was rumoured that she had compromised herself, that she

would never be able again to show in the *salons* of London, and that flight only awaited her. She is here to-night, and the world has agreed to be oblivious. Then there were curious rumours about Captain Gardenhurst's solvency, nay, even honour, not long since: for a while he disappeared; he was heard of at Baden, he was seen at Homburg. It was at the latter place that he became the hero of a not very reputable species of encounter with a sham baron. Society was told about it, and society, vowing that Captain Gardenhurst was incorrigible, shook its head, and said that the line must be drawn somewhere. However, the Captain's opulent uncle died, and the Captain became his heir. The Hebrews were paid off, and Captain Gardenhurst is pronounced by such an arbitress as Lady Tyghtefytte herself to be a charming creature. Hence *præter omnium opinionem*, as Balbus used to remark in the Latin Delectus, our friend is here to-night. Nothing succeeds like success. The man who is almost a Pariah at the termination of one season may, if the cards are lucky, find himself a hero at the commencement of the next.

A motley crowd, in truth. 'Tis a blessed invention that of the Long Vacation—a supreme device for smoothing over, nay, annihilating all little obstacles, whether they be affairs of hearts or affairs of honour, which a discriminating public have pronounced six months since to be insuperable barriers in the way of So-and-So's "showing up" again; and, reader, if you have realized the situation

which we have endeavoured to describe, you will agree with us. Plunge as you like, or have your existence marred by the coquetry of a ballroom belle, and yet you will assuredly find yourself, unless the game is very much against you, after three or four months in Scotland, Norway, or Central Europe, ready to begin anew, and duly invited to Lady Tyghtefytte's first crush of the season.

We have had a glimpse of one at least of the new beauties: let us turn for a moment to the old favourites. If the recuperative power of certain of Lady Tyghtefytte's guests is marvellous, the faculty of self-preservation which others display is scarcely less wonderful. Who does not know Miss Semperton? How long has not everyone known her? For ourselves, we can recollect her distinctly ten years since. She was confessedly one-and-twenty then: oddly enough she is but five-and-twenty now. Ten seasons do not pass over the head without leaving their mark in some shape or other; and if you fancy that you can discriminate in Miss Semperton's countenance a few slight traces of wear, you are but discovering that Miss Semperton is not more fortunate than the rest of mortals in her search after the elixir of perpetual youth. She has certainly, however, in a very surprising degree, the knack of always appearing to the best advantage, and she is looking even better than her wont to-night. How is it Miss Semperton has not yet quitted the condition of single blessedness? The old

story, we suppose; as for the marriageable youth of the present day

> "Their weary song,
> The whole day long,
> Is still, *l'argent, l'argent, l'argent.*"

And Miss Semperton, though perhaps senior in point of ball-room standing, is but the representative of a class.

There is another order of attendants at Lady Tyghtefytte's to-night, who are to be seen season after season in the ball-rooms of London with unvarying punctuality—the class known as that of Chaperons. Long-suffering and patience inexhaustible are the characteristics of these. Night after night are they at their stations—pale and worn frequently, not quite in the most angelic of tempers sometimes; but still as assiduous as ever in the performance of their duties. When will these ladies ever receive at the hands of their protégées the debt of gratitude which is their due? And is there any truth in the report—we trust devoutly for their sakes there may be—that chaperons are to share the fate of the Irish Church, and cease as an establishment to exist?

CHAPTER XII.

DRAWING-ROOM STEPPING-STONES.

How to get into Society? — Exclusiveness of modern "Sets" — Brilliant social *coups* exceptional — Victory of Mrs. Piquante Loraine — Case of the Fitz Jugges — Social ambition; efforts and failure — Social Stepping-stones — Introduction by advertisement — The Countess of ——— and Mrs. Ironstone — If there are marriages of convenience, why not friendships or acquaintanceships of convenience? — The system of introduction by advertisement compared to bribery at elections.

Society has become a phrase. Has not Jack Pungent written one of his most admirable comedies on the theme, giving it no other title save this one charmed word? We use the epithet charmed "advisedly," to adopt the conventional slang of the House of Commons, for if there is a divinity which doth hedge a king, there is a certain magical quick-set fence which bars the access to the drawing-room. How is this barrier to be surmounted—how is the social blockade to be run? Will one bold straightforward effort carry the day? Is it enough to muster up the whole strength for one tremendous bound, or must tactics of a different order be resorted to? The stronghold of society and the sanctum of fashion are not to be taken possession of in this informal way. When a

delicate task is to be essayed, the method in which it is to be conducted must be proportionately delicate also.

At any rate, such is the law for the majority of mortals. Social exclusiveness is one of our national characteristics, and will remain so probably till the end of time. One half of the world does not know how the other half lives, and we may say with at least equal confidence that the doings of one social set are scarcely known to the set immediately above or below it. But the principle which at bottom animates the movements of all is identical—a principle of essential antagonism to the outside world at large, and of tacit but obstinate resistance to all new comers. In its way the coterie of which Mrs. Blogg or Mrs. Cruppins is the leading spirit and presiding deity, is quite as inaccessible to the new comer as that over which Her Grace the Duchess of Manystarres reigns supreme. The difference is one of kind, not of degree. The canons of discrimination, the tests of judgment, and the standards of suitability vary, but there all difference ends. In each case alike there are certain canons, tests, and standards.

But to get into one particular set is one thing, to get into society in a general way is another. Lady Stuckuppe may ask you to her balls, occasionally to her dinners, and sometimes to her evenings: undeniably you are in society, but you are with equal certainty not in her ladyship's set. You are not one of the chosen few, not one of the happy elect on whose forehead the seal of a great distinction is fairly pressed. Still something has been achieved—some-

thing for which thousands of persons are yearly and hourly striving, lavishing in the meanwhile, for the fulfilment of their object, time, money, dignity, and self-respect. Just as London swells in population visibly, stretching out its gigantic and all-absorbing feelers on every side with their infinite power of magnetic attraction, so is the number of aspirants to society duplicated, trebled, quadrupled. In these days everyone comes to town for six weeks or so during the season. To enjoy the season one must be in society. How is this ambition to be realized? How is this pinnacle of supreme pride to be reached?

We have said that for the majority of mortals any startling or brilliant *coup* is a forbidden and futile policy. "I bide my time:" that must be the motto of the social aspirant. 'Tis the dark horse that usually wins; 'tis the "creeping up" and "lying away" system that generally succeeds. *Coups* indeed, of exceptional magnitude attended by singular felicity, there may be from time to time made. At most there are not more, on an average, than two in the course of a London season, and then only under peculiar circumstances. For instance, take the case of Mrs. Piquante Loraine. The victory of this lady was celebrated as recently as the month of June in the present year of Grace, and a victory on which the fair victress might congratulate herself it most undeniably was. Silent even as the building of the Jewish Temple was her social exaltation, but it was swift beyond precedent. To this day no one knows exactly how it was that the pretty

widow won her place. She came, she saw, she conquered, Unrecognized yesterday, she was a popular favourite on the morrow. She appeared in May Fair, and before the world had time to wonder who she was and what she was, her name was everywhere, and she was with her name. Paris it was, a week since: Mrs. Loraine arrived in London with a retinue of servants, carriages, and what not, else; a house awaited her in Eaton Square, and the triumph which she had achieved in the land of the Gaul was re-enacted on the social stage of the metropolis. Women hated; men smiled; Mrs. Loraine conquered. While the world wondered, she acted. Some there were who said that the swiftness of her ovation—for an ovation it was—was due to her acquaintance with the Manystarres family in Italy; some ascribed it to the influence of the leader of fashion whom it was reported Mrs. Loraine had known at Biarritz, and others to diverse causes, which we need not recapitulate here. What was the use of conjecture? there was the fact. Mrs. Loraine was ubiquitous. "Satan finds some mischief," &c., and the fair lips which had nothing else to do save to flavour the passing word with the acid of jealousy, might shape themselves into calumnious utterances, might hint at eccentricity of social antecedents, and suggest anecdotes with St. Petersburgh for their scene. But Mrs. Loraine's *salons* were not the less frequented on this account; not the less brilliant were her *réunions;* not the less eminently successful her dinner parties. And when a month or two subsequently

the "world," departed from London, was left to mourn over the ruins of the extinct excitement of the season, it was generally, very universally acknowledged that Mrs. Loraine's garden party at her Kingston villa was *the* grand climateric of the year.

It is true that Mrs. Loraine is a fact, not a fiction. But you might just as well lay odds on the chance of winning the prize in a Frankfort lottery as venture to predict for yourself or anyone else a repetition of this brilliant fortune. It is not everyone who is a pretty widow—young, with charming manners and an infinite profusion of this world's goods.

When the Fitz Jugges—late Juggs—we have seen the head of the house already on a former occasion at the Junior Carlton Club — arrived in England from their colonial home, they found the social campaign on which they embarked work of a very different nature from that experienced by Mrs. Loraine. If Mrs. Fitz Jugge had been content with those circles in which the commercial element is mainly distinguishable, all might have been well; for Mr. Fitz Jugge had and has an extensive acquaintance among the city potentates of London. The wives and families of these gentlemen would have received and returned with an infinity of pleasure the hospitality of Mrs. Fitz Jugge. Their daughters would have been ready to receive Miss Fitz Jugge—an agreeable, though somewhat pert, little miss—as their acquaintance and friend; and altogether a very

respectable social career might have awaited the whole family. But this would not do. Mrs. Fitz Jugge aimed at higher game. For her it was not enough to be in a certain kind of "society." Her ambition refused to be cribbed, cabined, and confined by the narrow horizon of the social section into which destiny had thrown her. Her "set" was ready waiting for her—foreordained by nature; but the "set" was not to her satisfaction. Starting with the vulgar belief that money is a passport to anything and to any place, Mrs. Fitz Jugge cast longing eyes upon the charmed circle of superior "sets." She would be a recognized leader of fashion, or she would be nothing. She would visit the houses of the aristocracy of wealth as well as of the aristocracy of birth, and the guests who entered her own mansion in Lancaster Gate should not be merely those whose very tread seemed to resound with the chink of the everlasting dollar. As for Fitz Jugge himself, he objected *in toto* to these principles of action; but the grey mare happened to be the better horse.

As we have said, Mrs. Fitz Jugge contrived to get her husband elected to the Junior Carlton; and he, long-suffering and much-abused mortal as he was, received special instructions from *Madame sa femme* to miss no opportunity of cultivating all the eligible club acquaintances that chance might bring within his reach. Let him ask them to dinner; let him endeavour to organize snug little parties to Richmond, Greenwich, and wherever else might seem advisable. This, in Mrs. F. J.'s opinion,

was the insertion of the thin end of the wedge. For the rest, it would all come in due time. The high excellencies of the Fitz Jugge *ménage* and the elegant *abandon* of the Fitz Jugge drawing-room once being known social intercourse of the most desirable description would presently ensue. It was with this same end in view that, after a considerable degree of trouble, enough knowledge was crammed into the head of young Fitz Jugge to enable him to enter at a certain college in Oxford, not celebrated for the exacting nature of its matriculation requirements. The heir apparent was told by his fond mother to bring home, during his vacation, any acquaintances of the right kind, and before proceeding to the banks of the Isis, was treated to a grave maternal homily as to the necessity of making the best connections which he could, and as to the numberless advantages which on this head Oxford would certainly offer. It can scarcely be said that the University career of this young gentleman was from any point of view a success. Academically speaking, he failed to pass a single examination; while all his social achievements consisted in the contraction of a crop of debts which fairly caused Fitz Jugge *père* to open his eyes with indignation and surprise, and to want to know how long this sort of thing was to last, as early as the conclusion of his second term, and the introduction to Lancaster Gate of a few choice spirits in the way of college friends, who by no means came up to Mrs. F. J.'s standard of eligible acquaintances.

Meanwhile the hospitalities of the Fitz Jugges continued. Still were the dinners given, and still was the house thronged with hungry guests; but the object with which the enterprising matron had started seemed as far removed from fulfilment as ever. She did, indeed, visit, and was visited, but neither at or by that order of persons whom in her fonder moments she had loved to represent as flocking together to do her homage. Whenever and wherever a good dinner is given, there will be no lack of people to aid in its consumption. Those keen-eyed vultures of society, professional diners-out, are a tolerably numerous and a marvellously sharp-scented class. The entertainments of the Fitz Jugges were their gala-days. The scene which the drawing-room at Lancaster Gate presented previous to the announcement that the banquet was served was a perfectly typical one. It was one mass of guests of that kind whom, for want of a better name, we may call social stepping-stones—gentlemen and ladies who make it the business of their lives to take eligible *nouveaux riches* by the hand, and to promise that they will conduct them to the social haven where they fain would be—that they will introduce them safely within that mystic circle which is at present an unknown world. A curious collection this, and one which will well repay a few moments' observation and analysis.

The social stepping-stone may be described in the rough as a creature that has seen better days, a faded flower, but a flower still, possessed of an interminable power

of glibly running off great names and of retailing by the yard an infinite string of social scandal and fashionable prattle; a winged bird, perpetually hovering over the confines of high life, and consequently taking a bird's-eye of the blissful region. In his or her time the social stepping-stone has known every one. The times have changed now; but reputation in the past is enough to support existence in the present. An elderly baronet in reduced circumstances is an extremely common description of social stepping-stone; so are old Indian colonels, decayed dowagers, and old maids of every possible order. You might see any and all of these in the Fitz Jugges' drawing-room. There was General Sir Pipeclay Martinet, a great catch in his way, whose business it was, on any of these state occasions, to take his post near Mrs. Fitz Jugge, and, the lady herself interposing an occasional remark to show that she was completely *au fait* with all the circumstances mentioned, to overwhelm the casual stranger in the immediate neighbourhood with a series of high-bred reminiscences and aristocratic anecdotes. The plan was simple enough. Sir P. Martinet would commence by accidentally remarking to Mrs. F. J.

"I saw Lord Dollyduff at the Marchioness's yesterday. He was particularly attentive in his inquiries after you, my dear madam, and he told me that my old friend Sir John Jinks—the Jinks of Shropshire; you know the family—had lately said, 'Dollyduff, my dear fellow:'" and so on.

The device may be threadbare; but still it occasionally succeeds. Of course this vein of conversation is only indulged in when there is some one by to overhear each particular word; and then, if the involuntary auditor is more than ordinarily credulous, he may depart with the impression that "those Fitz Jugges are curious people, you know, but devilishly well connected. Odd thing though, that Dollyduff and Lady Dollyduff are never to be found in the drawing-room at Lancaster Gate themselves."

"Dear Lady Faddle," as Mrs. Fitz Jugge delights to call her, emphasizing specially the epithet, is a never-failing attendant on such occasions as these. "Such charming people, Sir John and Lady Fiddle;—you must know them, dear Mrs. Fitz," pleasantly remarks her ladyship, playing with her fan the while; and then Lady Faddle promises that, in a few days' time, these titled incarnations of all that is agreeable shall call at Lancaster Gate. Mrs. Fitz Jugge declares that Lady Faddle is invaluable, and begins to think for the ninety-ninth time that the object of her life is at last in a fair way towards achievement. Sir John and Lady Fiddle may or may not call. If they do, the chances are that they will belong to the Faddle and Pipeclay Martinet order, and will assume the airs rather of social pioneers than of social equals.

What strikes you most in the drawing-room of the Fitz Jugges is the comparatively entire absence of young

unmarried, and middle-aged married, ladies. There are plenty of young men—club-mates of their host, or possibly comrades of his son; but neither their sisters nor their wives are with them. "A man can go anywhere," reflect and remark these gentlemen to themselves; "and hang it, Fitz Jugge gives as good a dinner as one ever need wish to sit down to. By-the-by, who are these Fitz Jugges, I should like to know?"

As we have said, Miss Fitz Jugge is a young lady with much to recommend her besides her pecuniary attractions; consequently young men are always at a premium at the Fitz Jugge establishment. But neither the excellent dinners that were given at Lancaster Gate, nor the gushing welcomes of Mrs. F. J., nor the captivating charms of the daughter, nor the extravagance of the son, were of any avail. Mrs. Fitz Jugge could no longer deny the fact to herself. Her career was a failure. She had made her venture, and that venture was not successful. It was to no purpose that impecunious old Sir Pipeclay Martinet received subsidies which he never returned; it was to no purpose that latterly Lady Faddle lunched at Lancaster Gate as regularly as the luncheon-hour came round; that Fitz Jugge brought home stray acquaintances from the Junior Carlton, and that Mrs. Fitz cast about for a seat in Parliament for her husband. Much money and much time had been spent. Many mortifications had been endured. There had been little momentary gleams of

triumph; but they had after all been mere flashes in the pan. Mrs. Fitz Jugge began to invent a variety of theories to account for her failure, based upon the antagonism, necessary or supposed, between English and colonial ideas. Mr. F. J. began to grow irritable, and mention the word expense oftener than he had done before. Miss Fitz Jugge went imprudently far with a vapid young subaltern in a line regiment. The result of all this was that, on the plea of the ill-health of Mrs. Fitz Jugge, the whole family found it convenient to remove to the Continent. The tribe of Sir Pipeclay Martinets and Lady Faddles was left behind; and when last we heard of these, they were lamenting the weak constitution of dear Mrs. Fitz, which rendered continental air so imperative a necessity, and agreeing with each other that, take them for all in all, they would not be likely soon to see protégés so profitable as the Fitz Jugge family in general had proved to be.

'Tis a dangerous and a costly game at which to play—this attempt pushing and being pushed into society when the stars are adverse: *τὸ κηδεῦσαι καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀριστεύει μακρῷ*, says the Greek dramatist. What is true of marriage is true of the social instinct in general. One's plane, in other words one's set, is mapped out for one by nature. It is better to "take it as the Fates ordain it." Were people but content to do this, there would be no place for the social stepping-stones we have mentioned, for the Sir Pipeclay Martinets and Lady Faddles, for the whole

keen-scented pack of parasites and toadies, hypocrites, humbugs, and vultures who now find a congenial occupation in the drawing-rooms of which the Fitz Jugges may be accepted as the type. Society, let us here say, is an entire lottery. The race is not always to the swift; and it is not always those who might be thought to possess the highest social qualifications that realize their ambition.

Now, as the intelligent reader will probably be enabled to understand, from the insinuations which we have ventured to make, it is not by any means the case that the devotion which Sir P. Martinet and Lady Faddle paid to the Fitz Jugge circle was wholly disinterested. Gross business-like arrangement, as between debtor and creditor, there was indeed none; but there was a kind of a tacit understanding that in lieu of the material comforts afforded by the mansion which they so frequently visited, these titled guests should do all in their power to advance the social prestige of their entertainers. There were rumours, indeed, of accommodation bills between Sir Pipeclay and Mr. Fitz Jugge, and of neat little presents of jewellery passing from Mrs. F. to Lady Faddle. Such rumours may or may not have been true. On the latter hypothesis all that it is needful to remark is that they were due to the promptings of an instinct of somewhat mercenary generosity on the part of the Fitz Jugges rather than to the traces of any preconcerted arrangement. In the case which we are now going to select all this is reversed.

"A lady of rank and title, moving in the very highest circles, will be glad to give any other lady the benefit of her experiences and introductions. For further particulars inquire by letter of," &c. . . Has the intelligent reader ever happened to notice an advertisement to this effect in the columns of any of the journals? If not, it is simply because his examination of the said columns has not been as sifting as it might have been, for such advertisements assuredly from time to time there are. Their meaning? Well, that is tolerably obvious one would think. The workman is worthy of his hire, social advantages have a market value; if a man sells his vote, why should a lady not sell her power of introduction to the highest circles of society? These are the principles upon which such advertisements are printed, and upon which the offer that they contain is made. The announcement is read eagerly enough by more than one pair of feminine eyes, you may be sure. A written reply is the result: a meeting is arranged. Scene, a drawing-room—say in Belgravia. Profound secrecy has been sworn to on both sides. The Countess of —— is seated awaiting the arrival of her visitor—Mrs. Ironstone, wife of J. Ironstone, Esq., the great mine owner in Yorkshire. Enter the lady. Bows are reciprocated. The Countess closely scrutinizes. There are two questions to be considered. Firstly, is the sum which Mrs. Ironstone is prepared to pay sufficient to reward her for the trouble to which she will have been put. Secondly, are the natural appearance and address

of the opulent parvenue such as to enable her (the Countess) to undertake the work of fashionable charity which she contemplates, without any peril of compromising her position or herself? Does Mrs. Ironstone, in a word, possess those rough materials out of which an artistic product may be developed, and the means of paying for such a process the price which it deserves?

The Countess of —— *loquitur*: Of course Mrs. Ironstone understands the critical nature of the matter. Still, should the arrangement prove mutually agreeable, there is no reason why it should not be carried out. Then a little conversation on general affairs may ensue, and Mrs. Ironstone will not improbably produce some material guarantee of her husband's financial resources, some earnest of what is afterwards to be expected. Possibly Lady ——, playing negligently with a filigree card-basket, so contrives matters that the ambitious consort of the Yorkshire manufacturer shall catch a glimpse of the numberless cards surmounted with coronets, and inscribed with noble names which gild its surface. Possibly, too, this glimpse supplemented by her ladyship's languishing expression, "It is desirable that you should thoroughly understand the advantages which you will experience from such a contract," gives the final impulse to Mrs. Ironstone's ambitious instincts, and at once forces her to conclude the "contract" at a positively fabulous cost to her honest husband. What is the result? The House of —— "of the first part," we believe that is the correct

business phraseology, begins to look up. Her ladyship is once more in funds; once more her equipage is brilliant as in the halcyon days that are gone by; once more paste is discarded, and diamonds, real, of the first water, carry the day; once more the mansion in Belgravia is nightly resplendent with company and wax lights. On the other hand, Mrs. Ironstone, "of the second part," is suddenly immersed in a new and strange vortex of fashionable dissipation. Suddenly she, who was yesterday a nobody, is a woman of rank in the London world. Her daughters are asked everywhere; for these young ladies are well bred, well educated, and accomplished. Mrs. Ironstone herself, though intriguing and ambitious, is ladylike. Unless she were, it would scarcely have been worth while for the Countess of —— to "take her up."

That is the social expression by which the whole arrangement is conventionally summed up; and of this arrangement, whatever may be thought and whatever may be said, we are only able to remark, "Such things are." Let us look at the whole matter quietly. We have marriages of convenience: this is simply a friendship, acquaintanceship, if you like, of convenience. If society agrees to condone, to encourage, and to defend the former, why not so the latter? A few social privileges can scarcely be considered less appropriate matter for conversion into merchandise than human hearts. And the principle of barter in each case is identical. Sordid, mean, dishonourable, these are the epithets which would

naturally be applied to such friendships of convenience as we have here mentioned. Yet to society in general it is by no means out of the question to suppose that the arrangement may incidentally be really beneficial. Severe exclusiveness is the bane of all English social intercourse; the system to which we have here adverted is at once the Nemesis and the antidote of this exclusiveness. As we have said elsewhere, the permanence and influence of a national aristocracy depend entirely on its catholicity, on the power of interpenetration with the various mixed elements of English life which it achieves, on the general hold which it acquires of the mind of the multitude, and the manner in which it is able to identify popular interests with itself. These introductions by advertisements have at any rate these advantages—they do extend the circle of aristocratic influence, because they cement a social alliance, no matter what the terms of that alliance may be, between the upper and the middle classes. Injustice implies compulsion. These compacts are at least entered into with perfect spontaneity on both sides; they cannot, therefore, at any rate, involve an injustice.

We have compared the introduction by advertisement system to what is ordinarily known as the phenomenon of bribery. What holds true of the latter holds true of the former. It is all very well for theorists to insist on the magnitude and sanctity of the privilege which the working man enjoys of having an active voice in the government of his country; but to appreciate a privi-

lege one must first understand its meaning. Now in ninety cases out of a hundred this is just what the working men, whom a well-meaning Parliament has recently entrusted with a vote, do not. Of the worth of money they are perfectly well aware; of the worth of the franchise they know nothing. As for political ideas—we speak now mainly of the agricultural districts—these are commodities of which they are wholly and entirely destitute. Meanwhile, there is one thing with which they are most intimately acquainted—poverty, with its cruel, griping clutch. Before a man can be instructed morally or mentally, he must first be alleviated physically. The blessings of the suffrage may be realized when the curse of poverty has been cured. Political power may be a fine thing; a five-pound note is a still finer. What to do with the former our agricultural labourer has not the faintest notion; what good the latter can effect he can tell you most accurately. According to this view—and it is the view which ninety per cent. of the newly enfranchised classes hold, for we must take facts as they are—bribery is neither morally hideous nor politically unjust For doctrinaires to sit in their libraries and frame fine-spun theories of government is easy matter enough. They make one mistake: they begin at the wrong end: they work from the top downwards. Instead, they should adopt the principle acted on by Fuseli in his statues, and work gradually upwards from the bottom.

But the loop-holes through which it is possible to creep

into society, and the stepping-stones by means of which it is possible to cross the stream that separates the known from the unknown world—all these are innumerable. If it is your luck to retire to your couch at night obscure, and to discover, as you open your eyes on the following morning, that your fame is made, yesterday you may have been almost a social Pariah, but you will assuredly be a Crichton to-day. You may marry a charming wife; and lo! you, till now a social eremite, may find that your drawing-room is the most favoured in the metropolis. Whether you like to be spoken of as "Laura Lakeley's husband, you know," is another question.

CHAPTER XIII.

DRAWING-ROOMS NOT IN SOCIETY.

"Not in Society" — True meaning of the word "*Demi-monde*" — Popularity of Drawing-rooms not in Society a reaction from well-bred and rigid formality of the day — Madame Noire's Drawing-room in Marlborough Square — An evening there — The company — Colonel Glinton and Mr. Ironstone — Captain Blueitt and Mr. Tan — The little room down-stairs — Mr. and Mrs. Warrington Wedderburn — Their Sunday dinner parties — Who are there? — "Cards on Sunday night; Mr. Fuzzle, are you not shocked?" — Mrs. Hendon's Drawing-room — Mrs. Vernon.

THE drawing-rooms of London are not all comprised in the *salons* of Belgravia and the West End. There are drawing-rooms and drawing-rooms — drawing-rooms of *ton* unmistakable, and drawing-rooms of indisputable vulgarity; there are the drawing-rooms of the territorial aristocracy, and the drawing-rooms of self-assertive commercial prosperity. Just as the Hebraic usurer may usually be discriminated by the massive prominence of his jewellery and watch-chain, by the superabundance of rings on his fingers,—were it feasible, he would certainly wear bells on his toes,—and by the general swagger of domineering opulence to be seen in each article of his raiment and each gesture of his body, so the drawing-room of the newly-risen city magnate is to be known at

once by the ostentatious splendour and tinsel showiness of its contents. The apartments which we shall treat of in this chapter, with their occupants, belong to none of these orders. We are embarking upon an entirely new, possibly a somewhat perilous sea of description. We are about to shift the scene entirely. Enough already have we sacrificed to the British deity of respectability. Enough for the present have we lingered in those *salons* which, whatever their comparative positions in the social scale may have been, have still been embodiments of decorum and models of propriety. Hitherto we have scrupulously adhered to the drawing-rooms whose owners are or might be in some species of acknowledged "society," according to the orthodox significance of that cant term. We have been most conscientiously correct. With questionable drawing-rooms we have had nothing to do. On that frontier-ground, that debateable country which edges the social outskirts, we have not yet trodden; much less have we been rash enough to endeavour to pass wholly beyond it, and openly and plainly to avow that we were "*not* in society."

"Not in society." We suppose, on the whole, that the apartments to which we intend introducing the reader, who entrusts himself to our guidance, would decidedly be pronounced to come under this head. Yet such things are; and as it is our main object to depict facts according to their real existence, we need not apologize for venturing here to break this dangerous soil.

Were it not that there is no phrase which has been so monstrously misinterpreted and so wilfully deflected from its original significance, we should state boldly at the outset that we are going to sojourn for a few pages in the *demi-monde*. But the expression has become so unjustly and so exclusively associated with the nymphs of Mabille and the sirens of the Wood of the Evangelist, that we forbear from employing it here. Correctly speaking, *demi-monde* is applied to the world in which persons who are out of the great world live, who hover round its borders without ever effecting an entrance, and who stand, through compulsion or choice, Peri-like, but not disconsolate, at the gate of the fashionable Paradise. Necessarily the word implies no idea antagonistic to a due sense of decorum, much less any idea congenial to dissipation or vice. But there are no abuses which flourish like abuses of language,—none which are so fruitful a source of permanent misconception and error. Once taboo a word, and tabooed it will ever remain: once corrupt its connotation, and the stain will never be wiped out. Hence it is that whenever we speak of *demi-monde* we link it indissolubly in our minds with bold manners, rouged faces, hard smiles, coarse laughs, and mercenary charms. These are themes which we may safely leave to those writers who derive their inspiration from the loose lyrics of French genius, and the more suggestive passages of the dictionary of Lemprière.

"Not in society." It is scarcely wonderful that in

these days when we are so much in society, we should be glad for a little while to escape from the oppressive constraint of its atmosphere, and to revel in the perfect freedom of social anarchy. There must be such a thing as reaction; and the reaction from the artificial laws under which we live in this nineteenth century is to be seen in the rose-water Bohemianism that, in some shape or other, is for ever asserting itself in the midst of our every-day existence. It is impossible always to be in a condition of ethical and social state-dress. We must unbend sometimes—no matter whether the process of unbending be performed at heterogeneously-constituted dinners at Richmond or Greenwich, or in dainty drawing-rooms of the Corinthian type. Nay, it may be even said that we need not go thus far, that in these days a sufficient amount both of laxity of conversation and bearing is to be found in the legitimate *salons* of Belgravia and Mayfair, and that the daughters of England's noble classes accommodate their tone to the most *dégagé* of tastes, and will assimilate their badinage to the most out-of-school humour. In plain truth, we are informed by the self-constituted moral censors of the period that expressions which savour of looseness and phrases not untinctured by slang have found their way into the gilded saloons of the female aristocracy. On the general subject which this remark opens up we shall have something to say on a subsequent occasion. It is enough for us here to remark that the criticism, if correct, does but furnish

another illustration of the truth which we have stated. The laxity, if laxity it may be called, whether of conversation or deportment, that may be said to mark the manners and the tone of the present day, is simply a reaction from the extreme formality and cold artificiality which have been proposed as the true standards of good breeding and the necessary accompaniments of refined manner; just as the social excesses of the Restoration were but the inevitable reaction from the Puritanical extravagancies of the Commonwealth.

Let not the most austere reader be alarmed at the title of this chapter, or allow himself to suppose for a moment from the tenour of the previous remarks that we are going to lead him or her whither he or she need have the slightest objection to follow, the mere object of our visit being investigation, wholly unaccompanied by any idea of approval. As we have said, the drawing-rooms which we are about to enter are of a questionable kind, but they are drawing-rooms which exist, and which ought therefore just to be glanced at.

In a certain square that lies somewhere between Piccadilly and Pall Mall—we will call it Marlborough Square; its real name is not Marlborough, but that does not matter—stands, close to one of the corners, an extremely elegant little mansion, one of the smallest, and certainly one of the most attractive in appearance, of all within the enclosure. Look at its exterior; and with its pensile window-gardens, its Virginia creepers climbing up the

walls, the ample folds of lace and muslin curtains which are perceptible behind its windows, it will give you the impression not merely of elegance but of innocence. Do you know who lives there? No? Madame Noire, well known erewhile as Mabel Maurice, who in her time has broken as many hearts as the most destructive ambition could desire. Still is Madame—she is a widow now—pretty, piquant, and charming. She has lost none of the old arts, and she can captivate a young subaltern in a line regiment with as much ease, and perhaps more satisfactory results, than she could when she was known through every regiment quartered at Shorncliffe as the most "dangerous flirt in the service."

Now, Madame Noire gives evenings, and twice a week—sometimes more during the season—you may see the little house in Marlborough Square brilliantly lighted up, thronged as to its outside with expectant broughams, any time between the hours of 1 and 3 A.M., and resonant as to its interior with the dulcet strains of Madame's execution on the piano, which is proverbially admirable. Shall we enter? By all means.

We pass the two reception-rooms on the ground-floor, and are ushered into Madame's drawing-room—a perfect *bijou* of an apartment, furnished in that exquisite taste which only a continental education can thoroughly ensure. It is a great evening at the little house in Marlborough Square. The room is crowded. There are young officers from the Guards' Club, a fair sprinkling of those characters who

any time during the last twenty years have been known as "men about town;" there are at least a dozen owners of distinguished titles, and you notice, perhaps, several rather juvenile but very opulent commoners. There, for instance, is young Loadstone, whose father died not many months since, and who has come into the whole princely paternal revenue derived from mining property, safe at the Bank of England, at once; and several others of the young Loadstone type. And there—yes, there is Madame coming up to meet us, resplendent with diamonds and beaming with smiles.

"So glad to see us—quite a great evening, is it not?"

But you are surprised at one thing. The room, as we have said, is crowded; but it is crowded by men only. There is an entire absence of the feminine element. Madame herself we have, and her particular friend and companion, Miss Feline, who lives with Madame, and perhaps the wives of one or two officers. Madame Noire receives, indeed, but her receptions are limited in a general way to gentlemen. Out of the front drawing-room in which we now are opens—oh!—such an exquisite little back drawing-room, the entrance almost concealed by the maze of satin and muslin pendant in the doorway. To and fro perpetually passes not merely Madame herself, but a considerable portion of her guests. That tall, handsome man is Colonel Glinton, the most regular *habitué* and most intimate friend of Madame Noire. He has just made some communication to that lady, and now

he has gone up to young Loadstone, to speak to that gentleman and to suggest an adjournment into the regions of the back drawing-room. As we have said, a perfect model of an apartment: odorous with flowers and gleaming with wax-lights. At present intense silence holds the air, and that, though there are nearly twenty persons in the room. But, as every one knows, whist and écarté are not games to be played in a perfunctory manner, and save the few who are intently looking on at the progress which the various *partis* are making, all the occupants of the chamber are engaged in one or other of these agreeably absorbing employments. Colonel Glinton has himself just sat down to a quiet hand at écarté with Mr. Loadstone. Madame Noire gives an approving smile, and glides away through the complicated folds of the muslin and satin curtains to her seat at the piano in the adjoining chamber. Again and again in the course of the evening the composition of the whist and écarté parties changes; but the tables are never allowed to remain empty. The back drawing-room of the little house in Marlborough Square contains to-night some of the most accomplished players of the game, ignorance of which Prince Talleyrand pronounced to be so wretched a provision for old age in Europe. Look at that table yonder. That gentleman, his back turned towards us, is usually considered to have a more accurate and technical acquaintance with the details of the interesting pastime than any other Englishman. A treatise

which he penned on the subject is accepted as a final court of appeal in all disputed matters, and a considerable portion of the distinguished author's income is said to be derived from his persistently triumphant prosecution of the game. His *vis-à-vis* is Captain Blucitt, well known at the Rag as a standing dish of the card-room, and at the Arlington as the appropriate inheritor of the motto, *sedet eternumque sedebit*, when used in connection with the whist table. Blucitt's career has been a curious one. Again and again has he been "hit" so severely, that the most sagacious *cognoscenti* in such matters have pronounced recovery to be impossible. Again and again has he had runs of ill luck enough to swamp the veriest Leviathan. Yet has he rallied; though how, or why, or whence no one knows. The fact is, Blucitt is a mystery—one of those social riddles unfathomable in their depth, impenetrable in their meaning. Blucitt has Mr. Tan—that is the name of the above-mentioned gentleman—as his partner, and congratulates himself accordingly.

Naturally Madame Noire's selection is not made up of players so accomplished and gamblers so experienced—for gambling it is, and that at very respectably high stakes—as Captain Blucitt and Mr. Tan. For instance, our friend Loadstone is a young gentleman whose education at cards has been neglected. Colonel Glinton, however, is kindly endeavouring to supply the omission; and if the fees attendant upon the process of his instruction are heavy, the pupil—for the present, at any rate—

pays them willingly enough: for Mr. Loadstone has heard that it is the correct thing to put in an appearance periodically at Madame Noire's, and a highly favoured thing to be able to procure the *entrée* of her drawing-room on such evenings as these. As for stakes, it is said that the sums which change hands in Madame Noire's *salons* are seriously large, and you may be pretty certain that gentlemen like Captain Blueitt and Mr. Tan do not play cards with no ulterior end in view save the amusement, or, as old Sarah Battle has it, "the rigour of the game." Walk round that little back drawing-room, and you can scarcely help overhearing a ceaseless murmur of speculation. Captain Blueitt is always game for a bet; so is Mr. Tan, and a good deal is done among the bystanders themselves in the way of what is called "backing their opinion." Ah, that young gentleman who has strolled in now is none other than Mr. Pigeon Plunger, whom diplomatic mammas are anxious to catch at once, before his visits to such *salons* as Madame Noire's have deprived him of some of the richness of his plumage. There are several other young gentlemen of this order observable, and it would be impossible that they could make their *début* on more appropriate ground than in the drawing-room of the little house in Marlborough Square.

But the evening wears away. 'Tis one o'clock, and a murmur of supper is heard. No ordinary meals are those served up at Madame Noire's an hour or two after midnight; but *recherché* little banquets which an Apicius or

Lucullus need not disdain. But before the party respond to the announcement, Colonel Glinton, after a whisper to Madame Noire, hurriedly leaves the apartment. He returns, and with him four or five other gentleman, who have been secluded for the last two hours in the room adjoining that in which the supper is served—a room the door of which is never allowed to remain open, and not accessible to all Madame's guests alike, on the occasion of their first visit to Marlborough Square. It will be busy enough an hour-and-a-half hence, when the report of champagne corks has awakened a responsive chord of daring in the breasts of these viveurs, and when exhausted nature has gained some of the refreshment for which she craved, in the shape of *truffles* and *pâtés de foie gras*. This mysterious apartment is specially under the supervision of Colonel Glinton, Madame Noire's *aide-de-camp*, when the hour which we have specified arrives. Who knows but you may get a glance of its interior? Who is there? We will endeavour to look and listen. You hear in accents unmistakable the words "Seven's the main," and you see, or your eyes are playing you false, a species of table with which experience at the Spas of Homburg or Baden has not made you unfamiliar. On the whole, you will be on the safe side if you frequent that apartment as little as possible: and perhaps, if you will not disdain the advice, it may be equally well if you do not suffer yourself to be on terms of excessive intimacy with pleasant, gentlemanly Colonel Glinton. Madame Noire's is a

charming drawing-room, but decidedly seductive; and though we have no wish to place too much credence in what is possibly a vague and untrustworthy rumour, still there are persons who say that a considerable portion of the funds which are lost at that table in that mysterious apartment, to say nothing of the capital invested in the back drawing-room up-stairs, finds its way ultimately to Madame's bankers, and contributes to the payment of the current expenses of the establishment. As for the relations existing between Colonel Glinton and Madame Noire, that gentleman is invaluable to the little house in Marlborough Square. He it is who discovers for Madame the latest arrivals in London, in the shape of young gentlemen worthy of an introduction to her sanctum; for Colonel Glinton has opportunity peculiarly favourable for the performance of this task. His address is admirable; his acquaintance without limit. He is a member of half-a-dozen clubs; and he never fails to notice and remember everything that passes.

Warrington Wedderburn's Sunday dinner-parties have achieved a reputation: for Warrington not merely gives unexceptionable wine and side-dishes, which would do credit to the most accomplished of professional *chefs*, but has acquired a distinction for collecting characters and celebrities of a certain order round his hospitable board. Frank Sprightly, the actor, full of years indeed, but even fuller of liveliness and vivacity, and Mrs. Frank, most pleasing of women, are very often to be seen at Wedder-

burn's. Then there are one or two *littérateurs*, amusing in their way—notably so, Mr. Graceless, who does those dashing leaders on sporting subjects for the 'Banner'—who will be there, probably, also; a few army men; perhaps, a popular actress—not in tragedy—and, with the exception of Mrs. Warrington Wedderburn, the company is complete.

"Who is Mrs. Warrington Wedderburn, by the way?" you ask. Well, for the guests at Wedderburn's it is quite enough that she is a pretty, chatty young lady—not very aristocratic or dignified in demeanour, with an occasional lapse of an aspirate, noticeable in her talk, and a general tendency to be flippant. But for the world at large—the great world—unfortunately this reply is not deemed explicit enough to be satisfactory. Besides this, there are one or two curious stories afloat as regards Mrs. Wedderburn's social antecedents, which require refutation rather than confirmation. The result of all this is that Mrs. Wedderburn is not visited, and that her snug little drawing-room in Laurel Place, Brompton, belongs emphatically to that order of drawing-rooms which are *not* in society. There is altogether, in fact, a certain nebulous haziness enveloping the principle upon which the Wedderburn *ménage* is based, which it is well rather implicitly to accept than too critically to examine. There are even certain passages hinted at—it is fair to say that these hints proceed mainly from Warrington's enemies—in Mr. Wedderburn's existence prior to his investing the present

Mrs. W. with the honour of his family name, which, if true, renders the position of the new partner of his joys and sorrows, to say the least of it, ambiguous, and which will scarcely bear the test of inimical inspection. However, Wedderburn has schooled himself into a systematic disregard of all these things. He has run through two estates, made two compositions with his creditors, and has thus in an astounding degree managed to fortify himself against the unkind innuendoes of the world. He has long since got bored with society. He prefers his friends at his Sunday dinner-parties to any number of fashionable receptions or gorgeous entertainments: and he has them accordingly with great regularity. How does Wedderburn live? Well, that again is problematical: "science deals with phenomena and not with causes:" and perhaps in this case it is better so far to be scientific, as to take the fact of Warrington's tolerably enjoyable existence without the inquisitive prying into the sources which supply him with his livelihood. He has a Government post it is true; but the income accruing from that is scarcely sufficient to minister to his necessities. He has, however, generally a very good book on the Derby; thinks nothing of winning fifteen or twenty pounds at his afternoon whist at the Pandemonium, and, it is whispered, usually contrives to turn these little Sunday dinners to account.

Well, the small banquet is over. Mrs. Wedderburn has made her final *moue;* Mrs. Frank Sprightly has exhausted her stock of *repartee;* and the former of these

ladies suggests an adjournment to the drawing-room. Frank Sprightly is in great form to-night, abounding in anecdote superinduced by Warrington's excellent '34 claret; old Major Fiddleton, the Anglo-Indian, is waxing hilarious; young Fuzzle, of the Treasury, is beginning to think that Warrington Wedderburn's is the only place worth dining at on Sunday, and that Mrs. Wedderburn is charming. "By Jove," young Fuzzle will tell his friends at the club to-morrow, "she's a deuced nice little woman. One can quite understand how that other affair of Wedderburn's arose (and here Fuzzle will shake his head in a mysterious manner), when one sees the present Mrs. W. Not a sort of woman, you know, for society—that would be coming it rather strong, but devilish nice for all that." Now Fuzzle, consciously or unconsciously, expresses the opinion generally entertained by Wedderburn's friends on the subject. Mrs. W. W. may not be, and indeed is not, in society, but her praises are very universally acknowledged and sung for all that by those who visit at Laurel Place, Brompton. Coffee is brought in, and liqueur. Warrington suggests a cigarette, and that finished, a stroll up into the drawing-room, for Mrs. Wedderburn has just commenced to play on her piano, in intimation of the fact that the company are expected up-stairs.

"Playing us into battle, eh, Warrington?" says old Major Fiddleton, as he hobbles on his gout-oppressed legs into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Warrington plays passably well, and music occupies agreeably an hour or so. At a signal from Warrington the lady rings the bell. Enter a servant, who, without waiting for any explicit directions, proceeds to lay a couple of card tables in a recess of the room. Packs are produced, whist is suggested, and whist accordingly it is.

"Cards on Sunday night, Mr. Fuzzle, are you not shocked?" remarks Mrs. Wedderburn: whereupon Fuzzle, who has not yet lost all that uneasiness which is inseparable from the ingenuousness of youth, blushes, stammers, and finally declares that of all things in the world he enjoys a rubber on the evening of the Sabbath.

When Warrington plays cards he does so in earnest. His partner to-night is Major Fiddleton. The stakes are five shilling points, and a sovereign on the game—not extravagantly high, but still high enough to swell a very respectable total of losses or of gains. Then Mr. Wedderburn suggests occasionally a quiet little bet; and altogether, before it is announced that the broiled bones and the omelette are ready down-stairs, a very decent sum of money has, in one way or another, been won or lost. Mrs. Wedderburn and Mrs. Frank Sprightly do not engage in the contest themselves, but they don't quit the drawing-room all the same. "Better we should be here," suggests Mrs. Frank, "to keep our husbands in order." And so the evening passes; and when two A.M. arrives, and the carriages come round, though in propor-

tion as Warrington's pockets have been replenished those of one or two others have been lightened, there is not a soul who has not enjoyed his evening in Mrs. Wedderburn's drawing-room, outside the pale of society as that drawing-room may be.

Once more let us change the scene. Still are we "not in society;" but the non-society world is sufficiently wide, and the typical drawing-rooms which it contains are various. There is no man more universally liked than Frank Hendon—"a strange fellow," say some of his friends, "but a sort of man you can't help feeling almost an affection for." Frank Hendon's strangeness is in truth but another word for a kind of fitful melancholy which occasionally oppresses him, and whose cause no one can divine. At Oxford there was not a more light-hearted and buoyant undergraduate in the whole of St. Ambrose, and his subsequent experiences in the world have not been of a depressing character. Mr. Hendon has, in fact, been singularly successful. He made literature his vocation, and he has shown by his subsequent progress that he has not mistaken it. Frank has chambers in the Temple, nominally rather than actually. He has nothing to do with the active profession of the law—never practises, and never wishes to hold a brief. All his work is done at home. It is there that he elaborates his novels, spins off his magazine essays, and does those profoundly learned articles on the republics of South America. At home; but where is his home? That is a question which many

of his old friends ask among themselves, but without being able to arrive at a satisfactory answer. What is the nature of his domestic arrangements? Where does he live? Is he married or is he not married? But Frank Hendon has never given these gentlemen any encouragement to interrogate him on these points, and without much encouragement it is not likely that they would care about engaging in the task. Frank appears in London no one knows whence, and disappears no one knows whither. He may be living in a garret in Bloomsbury, or he may occupy a palace in Park-lane. He says nothing about his *habitat*, and his is essentially a non-communicative nature.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Hendon neither lives in that quarter of London studied ignorance of which was a fixed profession in Mr. Theodore Hook's creed, nor in the aristocratic thoroughfare which leads from Piccadilly to the Marble Arch, and abuts upon the enclosure of Hyde Park. His Lares and Penates are situated in the neighbourhood of Beckenham, and his starting-point from London is the Charing Cross Station. A snug little home, too, he has in that leafy Kent district, and a pretty, fresh, breezy kind of drawing-room: nor a home and a drawing-room merely, but a family to boot. Frank Hendon is a married man; but with one or two exceptions there are few of his friends who are aware of the fact, and it is still fewer who receive invitations to come down to the Beckenham villa on Sundays

whenever they may feel disposed. As we have said, there is a Mrs. Hendon, and Mrs. Hendon has a drawing-room, but it is one of those drawing-rooms which are "not in society." We will peep in there, if you please, about seven o'clock, any evening you like. Mr. Hendon has just finished a long day's work, and is seated awaiting the announcement of dinner, playing with a couple of flaxen-haired, pink-faced cherubs—his two eldest. Mrs. Hendon, who has wandered out through the glass door upon the lawn beyond, re-enters—a pretty, graceful-looking little woman, but as much the reverse of *distinguée* as it is possible to conceive. She is very fond of her husband, and her husband is not merely fond of but good to her. However, as we have said, she is *not* in society. In plain English, Frank made a terrible *mésalliance*, and the owner of his drawing-room now was—can we write the word?—a barmaid once. But she has been a good wife to him. He has a comfortable, even an elegant, home, and there can be few drawing-rooms which would strike you as being in better taste than the apartment in which we are now. Frank has accepted the situation. Does he regret the past? Well, as he glances round the room, and fondles the soft-skinned little pet who climbs up his knees, and reflects upon the thoughtful affection of Mrs. Frank, he wonders whether any home could be happier. But Mr. Hendon is not a mere domesticated tame cat. He is a man whose ambition is proportioned to his ability. We have said that his

friends are apt to notice at times in his demeanour an air of melancholy which they do not know how to account for. Well, like many other men, Frank Hendon has learned the dismal truth that a matrimonial *mésalliance* is the deathblow to social ambition. Precisely as a wife may help a man towards the attainment of his aspirations, she may retard him. He has made his bed, and as he has made it he is content to rest on it; but because the mortification is of his own infliction, it is not a whit the less grievous. He accepts the situation, but his acceptance of it does not bar his secret annoyance at it. Frank Hendon has a decided objection to having his own affairs made matter of common gossip, and hence it is that he so seldom invites any of his friends down to the Beckenham drawing-room. Well, most men have their skeletons: there might be worse than that which Mr. Hendon keeps.

"Not in society." There are endless drawing-rooms which merit this description, and we cannot exhaust the list here. One more specimen and we have done. Columba Villa, Highgate, is a quiet; pretty, secluded, little cottage. Ask who lives there, and you will be told, Mrs. Vernon. Enter the drawing-room, and you will consider it charming; but like—nay, more than—those apartments which we have already visited, it is most pronouncedly "*not* in society." Mr. Charles Vernon is now a married man, and his wife is *not* the lady who lives at Columba Villa. Had there been truth in his protestations she would have been, and the three ruddy-faced

children would have not been stamped with the social stigma that disgraces them now. It is the old, old story: we need not repeat its details here. Mrs. Vernon will not reveal it; we may be sure that Mr. Vernon would not like it revealed. Yes, he has done all that money can do; but there are some things which money can not do; and these are of them.

CHAPTER XIV.

DANGEROUS DRAWING-ROOMS.

How is the epithet to be applied? — Mrs. McGrudder's view — A Morning call at Mrs. Howsefulle's — Miss Minda Howsefulle — "Let me play this for you" — Mrs. Howsefulle's return — "Won't you stay Tea?" — "Good-night:" a critical position: *Quantâ laborabas Charybdi!* "Quite safe, my dear" — Mrs. Lyteyoke's Drawing-room — "Who is Mrs. Lyteyoke?" — "I do wonder when young men will begin to have their eyes open!" — Mrs. Sprightly, the widow — General Snapdragon — Mr. Reginald Flirtely, booked.

By what rules are we to fix the appropriate application of the phrase which forms the heading of the present chapter? How in so doing are we to avoid giving offence, where no offence is intended? How shall we persuade the reader that the erection of our signal-posts of peril is just and judicious, free from arbitrary caprice, and the result of a true estimation of the nature of the ground which we are entering? The task is one both of delicacy and difficulty. Peril is at best but a relative term, absolutely meaningless save when viewed with reference to the temperaments and natures of those to whom it is applied. Where one man might be in a condition of inexpugnable safety, another would be in an extremity of danger. What are irresistible temptations to this man

have not the slightest attraction for that. Still, notwithstanding the immense variation in human sentiment which exists, it is possible even here so to reason and select our remarks that they may appeal to a tolerably comprehensive circle of interests and of feelings. Amidst a mass of multiplicity there is still something like uniformity observable in the instincts of humanity. The drawing-rooms which we shall here signal as decidedly dangerous, will be such as can scarcely fail to prove devoid of a fatally seductive influence to all those hearts, beating beneath the shirt-front of manhood, which are not entirely schooled into a perfectly stoical impassivity. Whether indeed "dangerous" be the proper epithet to employ, whether we should not rather speak of some of them at least as resources and refuges which may prove the salvation of the desolation of bachelordom, that is altogether another question to which different answers will be returned, according to the position, interests, and what not else, of those who make the reply.

If, for instance, you were to ask Mrs. McGrudder herself, the mother of four daughters singularly the reverse of attractive, yet marriageable withal, and hanging heavily on her maternal hands, what she thought of Mrs. Howsefulle's family as a circle into which to introduce an eligible young man, and of Mrs. Howsefulle's drawing-room as a desirable resort for the aforesaid impressible young bachelor in the course of his solitary evening, she would reply that the establishment was

decidedly dangerous, that Mrs. Howsefulle was an unscrupulously designing woman, that the Misses H. were "artful pusses," and that the less any young man saw of frivolous young ladies such as these, who had been brought up to regard a lot of flimsy accomplishments as the one great object of existence, and who knew nothing of those more solid attainments—and here Mrs. McGrudder would probably interpolate a sentence modestly expressive of her own efforts to instruct her girls in these branches of education—without which it was quite impossible that any young woman should ever develop into a good wife. Mrs. Mc Grudder's advice on the subject is, however, scarcely likely to be taken by any very considerable number of eligible young men, for it is generally believed that her cautions against the Howsefulle *ménage* savour more of jealousy than anything else, and that inordinate anxiety, futile as to its results, to get the different Miss McGrudders off her hands—all of them being ungainly and angular maidens—causes her to adopt a policy somewhat analogous to that recommended to the Old Bailey advocate, "No case, abuse the plaintiff's solicitor."

No cautions of Mrs. McGrudder's, however, no significant hints, no sinister innuendoes are likely materially to abate the popularity of Mrs. Howsefulle's drawing-room, or to warn off the race of marriageable young men from the dangerous ground. It is universally admitted that the Howsefulles *en masse* constitute a very charming family. The mamma may be a little bit *de trop* at times; the elder

brother, whom you feel strongly disposed at times to—well, kick—may be always so; and the two younger brothers may partake of the nature of unmitigated nuisances. Still, when all these deductions are made, it is impossible to deny that Mrs. Howsefulle's establishment is managed upon extremely agreeable principles, and that there are few places which it is possible to frequent upon occasions with a greater amount of pleasure than the Housefulle drawing-room. The four Miss Howsefulles, of ages varying from 23 to 16, are as pretty a group of sisters as you could find anywhere. They dress nicely, talk pleasantly, and possess an ample allowance of all those elegant accomplishments without which no young lady's education is supposed to be complete. Altogether, what with the fragrance of the flowers—and independently of those which their own garden furnishes, the Miss Howsefulles have quite enough to do with arranging in the vases the bouquets that the young men who leave their cards at the house are in the habit of providing them—the delicious air of refinement which floats round the drawing-room on a summer afternoon, when the rays of the sun effect a struggling entrance through the maze of drapery, lighter than air, that decorates the windows, the melodious rustle of silk, and the musical flutter of muslin, the glimpses of lovely faces which have in them scarcely less of music than the sounds, the low Italian windows open to catch the breeze, and leading to the daintiest little garden in the world—what we say, with

all these it is impossible to deny that there is something perilously seductive in the whole atmosphere of Arbutus Lodge—that is the name of Mrs. Howsefulle's residence—Hampstead. Then, too, as you come in reflecting deeply on the utter desolation of a bachelor's life in London chambers, it is probable that you will be led into a vein of thought, at once significant and dangerous, by the bewitching traces that there are of feminine delicacy in everything in the room, in the elegant disorder with which new pieces of music are scattered about, embroidering frames are visible, charming little work-tables placed here and there, in fact, in the presence of all those thousand and one decorative details, which immediately inform you of what Mr. Coventry Patmore has been complimentary enough to call "the Angel in the House." Enter Miss Minda Howsefulle, fresh and breezy.

"So glad to see you, Mr. Singleman. Mr. Hooked has brought us a sheaf of new music to-day." Mr. Hooked, it may be mentioned, is the name of the gentleman who has been fortunate enough to secure for himself the heart and affections of the eldest Miss Howsefulle. "I have just been trying it over, and there are some pieces which I am sure would suit you exactly. You must look at them."

And Miss Minda Howsefulle speaks to you in tones of interrogative entreaty, accompanied by a look which is adsolutely irresistible. What are you to do? Prudence would suggest the response—fly the house at once, with

the speed of a man running for his life; politeness and chivalry—stay. Stay, as a matter of course, you do.

"So delightful," says Miss Minda. "Mamma is out with Clara, Elise has gone to the Crystal Palace with Mr. Hooked, and Rose to play gooseberry. They wanted me to do it, if you please, but that is one of those things which I can't stand—a couple of spooneys like they are" —spooney, by-the-by, is a phrase which in the lips of a woman you dislike; but never mind, let that pass—"so I can play you the accompaniments without any danger of being hauled over the coals for making a noise."

Now, we put it plainly to you, What does this mean? What will it lead to? Here are you, an impressible young bachelor, condemned to an hour or so at least of the company of a very charming young lady, who is going to play over Heaven knows how many songs, for the simple purpose of seeing whether there are any which come within your vocal compass. The month is June; and June is not only the month of flowers, "the time of roses"—*testibus* the manifold bouquets which decorate the apartment—but the month of love; while, to crown all these perilously seductive influences, there will be the accompaniment of the melodies which Minda Howsefulle's delicate white fingers will thrill forth from the keys of Collard. Verily, 'tis dangerous ground. "Abandon hope, &c.:" that should be the inscription above the door of Mrs. Howsefulle's drawing-room. Peril is at hand. Sensitive, and keenly alive as you are to the insinuating

powers of feminine influence, it is more than on the cards that you may have committed yourself seriously before all these songs are played out. Miss Minda, you know, is seated on the music-stool, and it is your duty to stand immediately behind, and to turn over the pages, the while she executes the notes—a critical situation, in truth; for how can you help inhaling, placed as you are, the scented breath which floats from these perfectly chiselled lips? or if occasionally, by a curious coincidence, your hands, in the efforts which you make to extricate the required song from the pile of music that lies upon the adjacent chair, meet those of Miss Minda Howsefulle, is it you that are to blame?

But the occasion is not one on which it is likely that you would blindly follow the dictates of an ungallant caution. As we have said, of course you stay, and by the time that Mrs. Howsefulle returns, you have toiled over a whole variety of songs. As a rule you pride yourself on your voice; but that afternoon, somehow or other, your notes have gone wrong in an inexplicably obstinate manner. You have been high where you should be low, and flat—very flat indeed, perhaps, you will think to-morrow—where you ought to have been sharp. However, what of it? The afternoon has been pleasantly occupied, and you have succeeded, with considerable immediate satisfaction to yourself, in solving the problem of existence for the space of at least eighty minutes. As for Mrs. Howsefulle, who has just made her appearance,

and who presumably takes in at a glance the whole nature of the situation, that lady is delighted to see you.

"Now, Mr. Singleman, you really must pass the evening with us, and we will have some music. Fred and Charley"—these are the two objectionable sons to whom we have already alluded—will any person tell us, by-the-by, how it is that charming sisters should always have detestable brothers?—"are away in London, and will not return to-night, so we dined early; but if you will make your dinner at our tea we shall be delighted."

Of course you assure Mrs. Howsefulle that this is above all others the way in which you prefer taking your dinner; that, in fact, you really don't care for dinner at all—so we should think, remembering as we do the little banquet which you enjoyed last night with Frank Montagu and Bob Kennedy at the Pandemonium—and that tea is the one beverage, as it has given its name by a figure of metonymy to the one meal, for which you care.

Miss Howsefulle, squired by the useful and adoring Hooked, duly returns, with the unfortunate young lady who has been made to play, in Miss Minda Howsefulle's parlance, "gooseberry," from the expedition to the Palace of Glass at Sydenham. Music—yes, there is plenty of it; and then, as we have already said, the windows of the Howsefulle drawing-room open immediately on to the trimly-ordered garden, and what can be more delightful than a stroll into the little, daintily-kept enclosure while the cool evening breeze fans your own brow, and plays an

enchanting tune on the folds and flounces of Miss Minda Howsefulle's dress?

"We are always so glad to see you," says Mrs. Howsefulle, as on re-entering the drawing-room you take your place on the sofa next that lady, feeling it your duty, as you have sufficiently devoted yourself to the daughters, to show some attention to the mother, "and I am sure you work too hard. You really should give yourself a little more rest, and more frequent intervals from those dreadful chambers. Come, Mr. Singleman, whenever you like. We are very quiet people here, and you will always find us at home." And then Mrs. Howsefulle leads the conversation on to themes of a more general nature—the fulness or the emptiness of the season, the last piece of news—"You know, Mr. Singleman," remarks Mrs. H., "we live quite out of the gay world, and the smallest contributions of gossip we are always ready gratefully to receive"—the state of society at large, young ladies' dresses, the ages at which young ladies do and ought to come out, the subject of marriage, and lastly, by a dexterous adoption of conversational tactics, to the topic of Mrs. McGrudder, Mrs. Howsefulle's neighbour, the Miss McGrudders, and the shamefully energetic and conspicuous attempts which she makes to entrap young men into the matrimonial net—how she is always taking them out to balls, and always asking people to the house.

"If I were a young man," says Mrs. Howsefulle, "I should be disgusted. I cannot think how Mrs. McGrudder

can have the countenance to do all she does. As for me," continues Mrs. Howsefulle, "I always believe that what is to be will be, whether I wish it or no. When Helen married Mr. Dunbrown, it was a pure match of affection. Indeed, it had never occurred to me"—poor innocent, simple-minded Mrs. Howsefulle—"that his visits here could mean anything, till Helen came to me one night and told me all; and as it was with her so shall it be with all my girls. It is not my business"—and Mrs. H. infuses something of pious devotion into her tone—"to look out for husbands for them, or to make them bow to my choice. I have always said that I would let my girls select for themselves, and that marriage was a far too serious matter to be looked at as *some* mothers regard it, and that in these affairs one must trust to the dispensations of Providence, without spoiling the scheme oneself."

With the expression of which pious and pretty little sentiment, Mrs. Howsefulle begs that you will sing that new song which Minda tells her you got on so famously with in the afternoon. And so the evening passes away. As for you, you are very probably in a state of delirious excitement and enjoyment. The chances, at any rate, are that by this time you have irrevocably thrown the die. It is not merely the subtle witchery of the whole establishment which enchants you, but the example before you of Mr. Hooked is pretty certain to exercise a dangerous kind of effect, and the presence of an engaged

couple when you are in the midst of three or four other young ladies who are perfectly open to a similar engagement, has a strange and insinuating suggestiveness about it, and seems to bid you go and do likewise. "Now, Mr. Singleman," is Mrs. Howsefulle's parting invitation to you before you leave for your chamberward or clubward walk —it will be the latter if you are wise, for your nature, be assured, stands in need just now of the strongest antidote and the most vigorous appeals which it can possibly receive to celibate selfishness—"if you have nothing better to do, will you come and dine with us on Sunday—we shall be quite by ourselves—the boys will be away?"—it strikes you very strongly either that Mrs. Howsefulle has noticed your insuperable objection to the said boys, or else that she thinks it wise, for reasons of her own, to indulge to the utmost the centrifugal force which she has given you to understand is a marked characteristic in their natures—"and, with the exception of Mr. Hooked, you will be the only gentleman that we shall have—quite a family party in fact." And to you there seems an ominous significance in the expression, your sense of which is by no means decreased as you bid adieu to Miss Minda Howsefulle in the porch of the little villa, round which the jasmine trails and the passion-flower blossoms. A critical position in truth! *Heu puer infelix si quâ fata aspera rumpas*—you may be a bachelor, but, alas! "in how great a Charybdis do you labour!" Those last words before saying good-night. Heaven

defend us—they are the very devil! The clinging shake of the hands—the mute salutation of the eyes—the two whispered words—only two—the upward look at the stars —the downward look into a downward-bent face,—ah, unhappy youth! but you are in for it, we shrewdly suspect. On with thy hat, and bolt for dear existence sake. But Minda will look after you a minute from the door-post,—she likes you?—well, "just a little,"—and as she undoes the long coils of her silken hair that evening in the bed-room which she shares with her sister, we stake our veracity that there is ample justification for the remark which she will make in reply to certain impertinent questions asked by that young lady, Burleigh-like, shaking her head the while—"Quite safe, my dear!" Yes, young gentleman, you may go to the Pandemonium, but we very much fear that even that will prove an ineffectual remedy. The afternoon at Laurel Lodge has done for you. *Pol, te occidit!* A very charming family, in truth, the Howsefulles, but a decidedly dangerous drawing-room!

Dangerous drawing-rooms! A sufficiently numerous class, and, as we have said, of widely various kinds. A dangerous drawing-room most certainly, in the opinion of an extensive class of feminine critics, does Mrs. Lyte-yoke's deserve to be called; but then, feminine critics are perhaps unnecessarily severe when the subject of criticism is the doings of their own sex, and when the victim of their comments happens to be a general favourite with the

other sex. A favourite in this way Mrs. Lyteyoke undeniably is, and the little drawing-room in Hertford Street, Mayfair, is always pretty certain to be in request. Who is Mrs. Lyteyoke? Well, a good many persons have before now asked that question, and when they have received what at any rate seems an extremely natural and intelligible reply, they have sceptically shaken their heads, and refused to be satisfied. Yet we do not know what there is so incredible in the statement universally current on the subject of Mrs. Lyteyoke's position. Is she a widow? By no means. She is simply the wife of an Indian officer, Major Lyteyoke, of the two hundredth and twenty-second; and has been obliged to return to England, leaving him, much to their mutual grief, in the heart of Her Majesty's Asiatic dominions, because her health could not stand the climate. There is nothing very extraordinary in this, is there? Certainly not, the world—we mean that portion of the world which is mainly constituted of ladies—replies; but then, it is urged, for a married woman with a real live husband Mrs. Lyteyoke's goings on are just a little bit too *prononcés*. Why, was not the shameless way, ask these gentle moralists in tones of virtuous indignation, in which she flirted with young Recklesse of the Lancers last summer, and Mr. Multiple last autumn, the talk of the whole town? Is it proper, these good people would want to know, that Mrs. Lyteyoke should give dinner-parties in which the proportion of ladies to gentlemen is as one to five?

What are persons to think when Mrs. Lyteyoke's drawing-room is crowded with bachelors, or with married men who have left their wives at home? No, depend on it, says the world above mentioned, that Mrs. Lyteyoke is a dangerous woman, just as her drawing-room is a dangerous *salon*—one of those women of whom it is well and wise for a man to see as little as possible, or nothing at all. Why, was it not all Mrs. Lyteyoke's fault that that little unpleasantness between Mr. and Mrs. Breezy occurred, only a few months since, which nearly ended in little Mrs. B.—poor thing, she had not been married two years!—going home to her parents? Who else but Mrs. Lyteyoke was to blame when young Coigney, only a season ago, went on in such an inexplicable manner—never coming near the drawing-rooms of fond mothers, whose society they would have deemed most eligible for their daughters, but always dancing attendance upon Mrs. Lyteyoke, always escorting her to flower shows and garden parties, or driving her to Richmond, Greenwich, and where else Heaven only knows? What does Mrs. Lyteyoke mean, a considerable section of society would like to know, by all this and much else like this? Has she, or has she not, lost all sense of what is due to her husband, to herself, to her position, and to the world in general?

"She talks about Major Lyteyoke, my dear," remarks Mrs. Quiverfulle to Mrs. Wellstocked. "I should say the poor Major must be heartily glad to be out of her way."

"Major Lyteyoke!" is the charitable rejoinder of Mrs. Wellstocked. "Pooh, my dear; as for me, I don't believe there is any such person at all; and as for those two little girls, the less said about their parentage, in my opinion, the better."

"Perfectly odious, I call it," says Mrs. Quiverfulle. "I do wonder when young men will begin to have their eyes open."

But in spite of all this, in spite of comments such as these, in spite of unfriendly rumour of every description, in spite of tolerably well-authenticated reports that in one way or other intimacy with Mrs. Lyteyoke is sure to prove to all those who court it an expensive commodity, the popularity of Mrs. Lyteyoke's drawing-room continues, and the wife of the Indian officer does not fail stoutly to hold her own. Conspicuously, indeed, does the warning voice of the world announce the danger-signal at the entrance to the apartment in question. But of what avail is this? Whether it be Alpine climbing, horse-racing, or flirtation, do we not all know that the consciousness of peril ineffably heightens the sense of pleasure?

Then is not the drawing-room of Mrs. Sprightly, the widow, dangerous, too, in its way? Very dangerous indeed some persons have before now found it, for Mrs. Sprightly, there is no doubt about it, is a born flirt, and the very essence of a coquette. Yes, more than one ingenuous swain has burnt his fingers and singed his heart pretty severely in the elegant and enticing *salon* of

the lady in question, from Mr. Milde, the curate, down to old Col. Stodger. And so long as Mrs. Sprightly chooses there will be no lack, we may be sure, both of Mildes and Stodgers—gentlemen of sanguine nature, who are easily allured into the toils of Venus, and who have a more than moth-like fondness for buzzing around a treacherous light. Enter Mrs. Sprightly's drawing-room any afternoon you like, and you will be sure to find a select group of devoted victims engaged in the utterly futile attempt to enthrall Mrs. Sprightly, and fancying they are making love, while the lady in question knows quite well she is only making fun. Mrs. Sprightly has plenty of money; naturally, too, she has plenty of suitors. So long as it pleases the widow she will encourage them; and then, when it pleases her humour, hey, presto! in the twinkling of an eye, she sends them about their business. Decidedly dangerous ground that: once more we must hang out the signal.

Neither if you are a young man possessed of an emotional temperament, and only a minimum of self-control, should we advise you to have too much to do with the drawing-room of General Snapdragon, or to venture too far with any of General Snapdragon's daughters. The General is a widower, but he is a very old soldier, and a very old hand. Every one knows the summary promptitude with which he booked little Reginald Flirtely for his eldest. That innocent young man simply fancied that he was making himself extra agreeable. The General dis-

covered that he had known his father, or his uncle, or some other relative, and, simply for old association sake, as our friend Reginald thought, begged him to come to the house whenever he felt disposed to do so. In all singleness of heart Reginald accepted the invitation, and was at the General's very frequently indeed. One fine morning—it was true Reginald had gone a little far with Miss Snapdragon on the previous night after dinner, saying all manner of soft nothings to her in an amatory undertone, while he had fancied from the General's stertorous breathing that her father was sound asleep—the old soldier said he should like to have a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Flirtely. Reginald trembled in his shoes, but he was obliged to accept the situation. To cut a short story shorter than it really was, Reginald left General Snapdragon's study quite as good as the affianced husband of the eldest daughter of the family. Three months hence, and the pair were married. For which reason Reginald's old bachelor friends are in the habit of advising each other to shun old Snapdragon's drawing-room as they would—well, supposing him to possess the drawing-room of a very different personage.

CHAPTER XV.

SOME DRAWING-ROOM TYPES.

Scope of the Chapter — Mr. Reginald Finnicke, "the Lady's Man" — What Greece was to Italy, that France is to England — The cant of Gallicism — Mr. Freddy Bertram — His career — Significance of the Gallo-mania — Mr. Henry Smythe — His history — The Drawing-room protector: Colonel Bayard — *Amis* and *amies de maison* — Mr. Tom Clincher — Miss Fynesyghte — Miss Minnichaha Price — "Gushing" in the Drawing-room — The Gushing Maiden — The Gushing Wife — The Gushing Mother.

THERE are the standing dishes of the drawing-room just as there are the standing dishes of the club—fixed and immutable types, some or other of which you are certain to meet immediately on your crossing the threshold of every conceivable *salon* from that of the Duchess of Manystarres down to the less select, though, as we have seen, not less pretentious apartments of the social compeers of the Fitz Jugge tribe. Of the different variations of feminine hostesses, or of the many diverse kinds of purely individual eccentricities to be found in the drawing-rooms of the world, we have nothing particular to say in this chapter. We direct our attention rather to the stock commodities of character, the *communes loci* of human nature, as multitudinous as they are ubiquitous, to persons who

are noticeable less for any personal distinction and peculiarity, specially their own, than for the fact that they are representatives of an order and types of a class.

For instance, Mr. Reginald Finnicke can lay no claim, on the ground of any qualities or attributes which he possesses, to celebrity. He is nothing of a *rara avis*. Reginald Finnickes are as plentiful in their way as blackberries in September, and it is simply because he is such a very average example of such a very *vulgaris species*, that we think it worth while to introduce this trim little gentleman to the readers of these volumes; for an exceedingly trim little gentleman, with a look of consummate spickness and spanness in every portion of his general turn out, Reginald Finnicke is,—universally admitted by ladies to be a most useful man in a drawing-room, and an admirably serviceable member of society. Do you want to organize private theatricals, or charades, to beguile the monotonous dullness of a wet fortnight in a country house? Reginald Finnicke is the man. He knows exactly the kind of piece required, sees at a glance the capacities of your company, takes in in a moment the proper composition of the caste, and before you have time to reflect upon the arduous magnitude of the design which you have embraced, will have written up to Mr. Lacey's, in the Strand, for a sufficient number of acting editions of the play that he has selected; to Mr. Nathan's, in Covent Garden, for the necessary costumes and the portable stage, and will have organized all the *rôles* with

the discriminating sagacity of the experienced manager. Or perhaps you are desirous of completely establishing your social position in London by giving an afternoon concert at your house in Eaton Square, which will be looked back to when September comes as emphatically the concert of the season. What are precisely the artists that you should and can secure? How are you to set about the whole business? To you revolving these things, as they used to say in the Æneid, enter Mr. Reginald Finnicke. He is the *Deus ex machinâ* of the position. In a minute he tells you exactly the steps which should be taken; nay, if you like it, he will take them for you himself, and the whole matter is at once off your hands, and as good as done.

And in smaller matters Mr. Finnicke is equally invaluable. Perhaps you require some dresses for yourself, or some mantles for your daughter, with which you find it out of the power of your Parisian milliner, resident in Regent Street, satisfactorily to provide you. Happy thought! "That dear Mr. Finnicke" is on the point of making a trip to the French metropolis. He has, as you know, so perfect a taste in all conceivable articles of feminine attire,—"Gad," mutters sulkily honest Tom Brown, who is as jealous as he can be at the favours which he sees our friend Reginald enjoy at the hands of your eldest daughter, "the fellow's got such an eye for ribbons that I believe, if the truth could be known, it would be found he sold them himself behind the counter once"—that you

are convinced that any commission of this description which you may entrust to him will be executed as well as you would do it yourself. Will Mr. Finnicke undertake your business? Mr. F. is your very devoted servant. He would travel at a moment's notice to Antipodean wilds to please you, much less venture a voyage across La Manche to the gay capital, which, as Mr. Sutherland Edwards neatly observes, "was the Lutetia of the ancients and is the Lætitia of the moderns." Or you have been foolish enough to invite your friends to that particular species of fashionable abomination known as a "musical evening." Matters are not going off satisfactory. Miss Staccato, on whom you principally relied as a great star in her own special firmament to make the whole affair pass off with brilliancy and *éclat*, has, or professes to have, a troublesome cold. You have your own suspicions that the ailment has been suddenly superinduced by the fact that Miss Soprano, in an inauspicious moment, has just fired off a piece of vocal fireworks to the execution of which Miss Staccato considers she has a prescriptive right of priority. At any rate she will not sing, and an unpleasantly threatening hitch in your programme is the result. You catch Mr. Finnicke's eye—in a twinkling of it he is at your side. Trust him, he will manage it all for you. He makes his way to the fair but reluctant and indisposed vocalist. If Miss Staccato cannot sing, will she object to playing an accompaniment for him—a little Italian *chanson*—the words and the air, his (Mr. Finnicke's)

own, and the fingering so simple that there is no one else who he thinks could manage it at sight. Mr. Finnicke, it appears, is immensely popular with Miss Staccato —is there any lady ætat 17 to 70 with whom he is not popular?—and she at once acquiesces. Mr. Finnicke's performance gives universal satisfaction, and not impossibly when it is over Miss Staccato will have discovered that her cold is much less annoying than it was ten minutes ago, and that she will just venture so far to defy public criticism as to sing the rondo which she learned at Milan last April. Gentlemen of the Mr. Reginald Finnicke order are, thus, on the whole highly desirable auxiliaries to drawing-room success. There may be something exotic in their development, something artificial and highly strained in their manner; but at any rate they are infinitely more ornamental than the pampered pug which makes your hearth-rug hideous, and certainly ten times more useful. The one will not fetch and carry like a retriever, the other will.

As for knowledge of a certain kind, they are perfect walking cyclopædias. They are acquainted with a countless number of ingenious expedients and small dodges—from the most artistic method for the arrangement of furniture down to the most elegant way of peeling an orange, or the most effective and easy manner of looping up a dress. All this they have made the business of their lives. There are some men who find a field for their ambition in the stormy vicissitudes of a Parliamentary

career; others there are who live only for the robust pleasures of the chase, or the healthy occupation of the gun. There are men for whom existence is bounded on every side by the walls of their club. The Reginald Finnickes of society live only for the drawing-room. Was not the creature sketched fifty years ago by Byron in 'Beppo'?

"But 'Cavalier Servente' is the phrase
Used in politest circles to express
This supernumerary slave, who stays
Close to a lady, as a part of dress,
Her word the only law which he obeys.
His is no sinecure, as you may guess;
Coach, servant, gondola, he goes to call,
And carries fur and tippet, gloves and shawl."

Pass we now to a different species of drawing-room hero, though not without certain points of similarity to the order of which we have just given a specimen. That social phenomena repeat themselves has become a philosophical truism. History may not have yet entirely arrived at the scientific stage: sociology has. If ever there was a period at which Roman life, as it was in the days of the empire, was paralleled in modern times, that period is assuredly the present. It is not merely that in its broader features the satire of Juvenal is just as applicable to England now as it was to the seven-hilled city nearly two thousand years ago. There would be nothing wonderful in that; for the satire of Juvenal is based on and is coeval with the fundamental principles of human nature, and these do not change. But there are points of detail in which the pungent censures of the greatest disciple,

ancient or modern, whom Lucilius ever possessed are in a special and singular degree relevant to certain of the social phenomena of our own time. If the descent of scions of the old Latin nobility into the arena of the circus, to participate actively in the gladiatorial tussles of slaves, or the assumption of the *rôle* of pantomimists by the foremost members of the Roman aristocracy, lead us to place in mental juxta-position the passion which certain noble lords and high-born ladies possess in these latter days among us to emulate the company of the Strand Theatre in the performance of break-down dances and the singing of comic songs, the *Græculus esuriens* of the great native of Aquinum has an even more exact and striking analogue. France has been to England in more ways than one literally what Greece was to Italy. If Plautus and Terence got all their plots and a good deal of their dialogue from Menander and his fellow dramatists, our British playrights have paid the same homage of imitation to the originality of Gallic comedies. If the fashionable slang of the rapid and accomplished Roman youth was imported from Hellas across the waters of the Ionian Sea, much of the fashionable slang of English society generally hails from and is native to La Belle France. This was true in the days of Queen Anne: it is just as, or even more, strikingly true in the days of Queen Victoria. The extent to which the reproduction of French models, whether in the way of manners, morals, literature, conversation, and art prevails in the fashionable

drawing-rooms of the present latter half of the nineteenth century, is such that this chapter would be grievously incomplete without a few concrete specimens of the Gallicizing tendency.

Take the case of Freddy Bertram—we give the young gentleman the benefit of the endearing phrase in whose application to himself by his lady friends he rejoices; and if the name given him by his sponsors had been Auguste instead of Frederick, he would have been infinitely better pleased. Mr. Bertram is a clerk in a government office, and the principal material upon which he rests the fabric of his social ambition consists of a pair of bright silky moustaches—by no means discreditable in their way—a small person, but a neat figure, a manner which men pronounce insufferably and bumptiously snobbish, and a redundancy of French airs not acquired without much trouble and long practice. Feminine prejudice proverbially defies analysis; and we do not here most certainly intend, by any process of elimination, to endeavour to discover what are the necessary and fixed ingredients, or whether there are any, of drawing-room popularity. Let us take Freddy Bertram as we find him—a young gentleman who, in spite of his contemptible conceit and positively mal-odorous French affectations, is in his way a feminine favourite—pre-eminently a ladies' man, and therefore in every respect a drawing-room character. It was probably the accident of relegation to a continental school in the days of his childhood which first decided for

our friend the part which he has subsequently aspired to play in life. From the days when he was first whipped by a Boulogne pedagogue for some offence against the regulations of the establishment, his *métier* was immutably fixed. At the age of seventeen he returned to England, with a general idea that it was "bad form" to be patriotic, and that a British nationality was a natural and a necessary evil. The lad was a clever lad enough, and his civil appointment—a competitive one—was easily procured. His position and parentage ensured him an introduction into society, and he rapidly realized his ambition by achieving a reputation for Gallicism. His talk was French, his reading was French, and his dress as far as was consistent with fashion and taste—for our little friend Freddy is a man of both—was French. So very French was he, that sundry mammas, troubled with old-fashioned notions of propriety, and papas of antediluvian ideas of strictness, punctually tabooed the volumes in yellow paper covers which Mr. Bertram was in the habit of generously lending to their daughters; and refused *in toto* to countenance the piquant talk, the fresh stories, the social scandals, and the general gossip with which he loved to regale their impressible and readily receptive ears. In fact, Freddy Bertram soon came to be spoken of as a charming young man, but "don't you think so? So *very* French."

Two or three years rolled on, and our friend became more French still. In fact he was so very French, indeed,

and so entirely French in certain of his views respecting the nature of the marriage tie, that on one occasion he narrowly escaped a horse-whipping; on another it was said he was actually one of the principals in a little encounter which took place in the grey of the early morning in the immediate neighbourhood of Calais; and that on a third—such was his excessive Frenchness—he positively figured in a certain court of Westminster Hall, over which, at that time, Sir Cresswell Cresswell used to preside. Still Freddy Bertram held his own in society. It was generally allowed to be rather a pity that he had suffered himself to incur publicity as the hero of these episodes; but then he was young, as we have said, good-looking, and, "you know, doubtless the consequence of his early education, so very French in all his ideas." Society, in fact, encouraged Freddy, and for that Freddy cannot perhaps be held to blame. Society, however, encourages him still; and Freddy, though experience has now taught him so to play his cards that he avoids all risk of ever being brought into contact with Sir Creswell Creswell's judicial successor, is still as "French in his ideas" as ever. Not recognize Mr. Freddy Bertram? Impossible! You may know him by a glance, and you may tell him by a single sentence. That perpetual attendance upon ladies recently elevated to the dignity of married life—that languishing method of toying daintily with his well-kept moustache, and eloquently raising his eyes to those of the fair creatures with whom he is engaged in con-

versation—that lavishly ostentatious interspersion of his sentences with French epithets, and allusions that comprise the whole of Paris from the Bois de Boulogne to Mabille, and the Tuileries to the Quartier Latin: all these are the outward and visible signs of the Gallicism which is the rage with a certain section of the young men of the period, and in which Mr. Freddy Bertram is so accomplished a proficient. There is nothing on earth which these young gentlemen will not do to be thought French: they will risk the horsewhip—and they deserve it double-thonged—or they would face the duel. To be the reputed hero of an intrigue ranks with them as an honourable distinction: to have narrowly escaped—but still escaped—figuring as the co-respondent in a divorce case is at once to have produced indisputable title-deeds to fame. On the whole, we are disposed to think that matters of this order are among the things which they do not manage better in France. We have no wish to break a butterfly on a wheel; and, as we have intimated above, society is as much responsible for their existence as they are themselves.

But the degree to which "French" ideas influence certain portions of English society and certain sections of English thought, is not properly to be judged of merely from one instance of the Freddy Bertram order. We have seen it rather on its moral and social side: it has also an æsthetical and intellectual aspect. To form any just estimate of this, it must be remembered that, among

a not numerically insignificant class, a certain knowledge of French literature and French intellectual usages is considered to have, in a kind of manner, graduated in all elegant accomplishments of mind, and all indispensable knowledge of literary art. It may be well at once to say, that when you hear an Englishman, be he *littérateur*, journalist, or merely "man of taste," talking in a monotone of eulogy on French writing, French writers, and every species of product of French intellect, you may be quite sure he speaks from an extremely limited experience of the literatures of other nations, and that he knows nothing of the parent language, from which French, with the other Romance tongues, is derived. In the mass of examinations for posts in the Home Civil Service, it is, we believe, required that the candidate should "take up" one language in addition to his native one, and it is not required that he should take up more. The Gallo-maniacs appear to conceive that all which is necessary to vindicate their claim to a liberal education is compliance with a closely similar condition. They "take up," to pass the intellectual test of society, one language, and one only, in addition to their native tongue, which they so barbarously mutilate in their writings and their talk, and it is the French. When Puffy Subtle, novelist, magazinist, conversationalist, what you will, treats you to one of his favourite disquisitions on the nature of *chic;* on the untranslatability of the word *élan*—is not the British *dash* just as good?—or the

superb merits of Balzac; on the general superiority of French literature to every other literature that was, is, or will be; and on the marvellous flexibility of the French language when compared with those rusty, obsolete vehicles of thought, Greek and Latin; you know perfectly well that Puffy could not construe a page of the 'Anabasis,' if martyrdom at the stake were the penalty for failure, or understand two consecutive sentences of 'Cæsar's Commentaries,' in the original, were ten thousand a-year depending on the event. The town may not have become Greek in the way that Juvenal asserted was the case with Rome; but there could not have been more of the cant of Hellas in the Italian capital than there is of France in the English. Intelligent appreciation—nay, admiration—is one thing; the blindfold sequence of a fashion, merely because it is a fashion, is quite another. Because Beranger wrote inimitable lyrics, and because the *Chansons* of Alfred de Musset sparkle as champagne, a certain measure of acquaintance with these two classes of composition does not justify its possessor in assuming that he has mastered the loftiest canons of poetic criticism. Mr. Matthew Arnold is an excellent continental linguist, and an undoubted continental enthusiast; but his acquirements and his idiosyncrasies in this line rest upon a sound substratum of classical scholarship: he was a Fellow of Oriel before he wrote on Heine, and even Mr. Swinburne could translate the fragments of Sappho before he constituted himself the apostle of Baudelaire.

Of the Gallicized Englishman of the order we now have in view, Mr. Henry Smythe is a fair specimen. As the intelligent reader may suppose, this gentleman's patronymic was originally, and for some time continued to be, Smith—plain, honest Smith. But the vulgarity and unmistakable Britishness of the sound jarred so hideously on the sensitive nerves of our friend, that his life was made miserable, and that he started with horror whenever he signed a cheque—in his signature to his letters he made a stand against putting anything more than his initials—or gazed upon his visiting cards. Our friend went to reside in Paris, and lo, when he returned to England, he had effected a compromise, and was Smythe, with a special emphasis on the third letter of the name. Now Mr. Smythe is a gentleman possessed of some ability and smartness in his way. On the matter of education we may be silent, for Mr. S. knows French, and to know French is to know everything. His stay in Paris was protracted to a considerable length: why, is not exactly known. According to Mr. Smythe's own account, he grew so thoroughly naturalized in his tastes to the land of his sojourn, that the very notion of returning to England gave him a shock: according to the shrewd, though possibly unjust suspicions of his friends, tarriance in a foreign land was a necessary tribute to the exigencies of his financial position, and the only way in which he could conveniently and certainly ensure the enjoyment of the English privilege known as liberty of the person.

These are circumstances into which we need not too curiously inquire. It is enough to say that when Mr. Smythe returned from his residence in Paris he was very French. Not that he resembled the Frenchness of our friend Freddy Bertram in a moral point of view: for Mr. Smythe came back to his native land heavily weighted with a wife—French too—the daughter of his erewhile landlady in the Faubourg St. Germain, whom he had fallen in love with principally because she excelled in cooking savoury omelettes, and kidneys stewed in Burgundy. Let us, however, not fail to pay Frenchwomen the compliment they merit, and give all due praise to the singular superiority which they enjoy over our own countrywomen in at least one particular. Mrs. Smythe—her husband always insists in calling her Madame S.—like the rest of her female compatriots, possessed a sufficiency of tact to at once adapt herself to a sudden change of social circumstances. A French maid-of-all-work would very soon learn to acquit herself passably well, if, after the fashion of the king who espoused in so hasty a manner—by-the-by, if for no other than social reasons, we should like to know the sequel of the married life which ensued upon that match—the beggar-maid, some Cophetua *redivivus* was to be smitten with an erratic passion for her. Mrs. Smythe is in fact a very pleasant woman, and if her husband was but one half as genuine as she is, he would not be so conspicuously and entirely French.

And essentially French all over Mr. Smythe is—

French from the closely-clipped hair of his head down to the sole of his Parisian patent-leather boot; from his elaborately-twisted and rigidly-stiffened moustache to the cut of his collars and the hues of his scarf; from his ideas of dinner to his ideas of art; from his notions of house furniture to his notions on stage costume. He is a man of a good deal of mental activity, and has always in hand, or is always ready to have in hand, some new enterprise or other which affords him scope for the display of his Frenchness, whether it be the starting of a new periodical or the organization of a new theatre. He is of opinion that London journalism will never be in a satisfactory or complete state till it counts amongst its effusions the English antitypes of *Figaro* and *Le Petit Journal pour Rire*, and that the only hope of salvation which awaits the British stage is in a servile assimilation to French theatricals. Now the opportunities which he obtains in private life for the practical inculcation of this doctrine are not inconsiderable, for Mr. Smythe's circle of acquaintances is tolerably extensive, and his valuable services are habitually called into requisition for the getting up of amateur dramatic performances. For a whole month before that very successful little entertainment which the Countess of Footelights gave last season to her friends in Eaton Square, Mr. Smythe was the animating spirit of her ladyship's drawing-room. You entered the apartment, and there stood, the centre of a listening and admiring group, Mr. Smythe, expatiating on the necessity of playing this

part with a little more *chic*, or of singing that song with a little greater rapidity. The piece performed was, as you will probably remember, one that made such a hit two years ago at the Porte St. Martin, and the English libretto was the composition of Mr. Henry Smythe. According to that gentleman's own account, he must have had something to do with its original production in Paris. At any rate, there is not a single actor in the French caste whom Mr. Smythe has not favoured with his hints, and who has not profited by them.

These are the occupations in which our friend delights more than in anything else. They give him just that amount of importance which he desires, and keep him continually on the move, which his restless nature demands. His abilities in this line have also vastly improved his social position. Plain Mr. Henry Smythe, notwithstanding the *y* and the *e*, would not be esteemed very much; but Mr. Smythe, the brilliantly successful organizer of French theatrical novelties for private representation, is a standing dish with which certain fashionable drawing-rooms could ill afford to dispense. On the whole, therefore, it may be said that the career which he has mapped out for himself he fairly accomplishes, and that the ambition which he has proposed he very respectably achieves.

Colonel Bayard is a type of another drawing-room character habitually to be met with—a man who, amongst the class which he specially cultivates, is popular enough, and a gentleman to boot. There are few drawing-rooms,

provided only they answer certain social conditions which we will presently specify, in which a Colonel Bayard is not to be found. Given a moderately young and pretty wife, united to a husband whose tastes are not entirely domestic in character, and in some shape or other you may almost venture any sum that Colonel Bayard will presently appear on the scene. Not that the lord and master of the establishment need feel any qualms of jealousy at the introduction of this gentleman upon the scene. The *rôle* which the Colonel essays to fill is by no means that of a lover. In the attentions and visits which he pays he is studiously Platonic. He is rather the dragon who guards the maid of chivalrous story than the knight who breaks a lance to win her heart. It is the opinion of Colonel Bayard that a young and pretty married woman, if she is left too much to herself, as she certainly will be when her husband betrays an excessive fondness for periodical visits to Newmarket and whist at dangerously high points, is sure to get into trouble. Either she will pine away with vain, regretful longing for her distant lord, or, to revenge herself for the slight, she will suffer some young gentleman, perhaps of the Freddy Bertram type, to make hot love to her, and to compromise her name in the public ear. Now if Colonel Bayard once brings himself to take an interest in any lady circumstanced as we have described, he will strive to prevent all this. Himself a widower with two or three children, ripe in years as in experience—he is beyond the reach of

all too curious remarks and sinister innuendoes that can possibly, with any show of reason, be made. When, a few seasons since, he attached himself so faithfully to the drawing-room of poor little Mrs. St. Leger, whose dreadful husband was scarcely ever at home, it was, of course, absurd to suppose that the motive which impelled Colonel Bayard to constitute himself head custodian of the lady in question was associated with any other feeling than that of pure fatherly interest. He was certainly very frequent indeed in his visits to the little drawing-room in Clarges Street; but then, as he more than once answered Mrs. St. Leger, when entreated by her to make him her confidant in all matters that troubled her, he might, so far as his age was concerned, have four or five daughters several years Mrs. St. Leger's seniors; and it is of course a well-established fact that, in such cases as these, the man who is old enough to be a father is certain to have the instincts of a father. Curiously and unreasonably enough, the husband, who may, however, be allowed the luxury of an opinion on the matter, has altogether dissented from this view. As, for instance, was the case with Capt. Ascot, who, never returning to lunch without finding Colonel Bayard in attendance on Mrs. Ascot, and noticing also the frequent interchange of pretty little triangular notes between the Colonel and his wife, so far forgot himself as to ask Mrs. Ascot—strong language was unfortunately one of Captain A.'s weak points—"What the devil she meant by making such a fool of herself and

of him?" A question which he would not await to be answered, but which he immediately followed up with the remark that "for the future he would see Bayard farther before he would have him dangling any more about his house or his wife, and that in his (Captain Ascot's) own opinion, there was little enough to choose between him (Col. B.) and Freddy Bertram." This, however, was an exceptional instance; for, as a rule, the Colonel is far too skilled a "protectionist" to allow matters to take such a turn as this. Of course, the suspicion was unfounded; but then it is essential to Col. Bayard that it should also be non-existent.

Tom Clincher is another instance of a man who in his way enjoys a very considerable drawing-room popularity, and who, with others of his type, which is a distinct one, fulfils a definite and intelligible function in the great social economy of the *salon*. Tom Clincher is, in fact, a sort of *ami de maison*. He is on equally good terms both with the husband and wife of the drawing-room which he frequents, and is allowed by the former to be the "best," and by the latter the "most useful," fellow in the world. Useful he is in a different manner altogether from Mr. Reginald Finnicke, who by-the-by is Tom's aversion, If it were not for the obvious inapplicability of the metaphor, Tom might be said to belong to the order of what are known as Tame Cats; but there is something about Mr. Clincher which reminds you rather of a favourite Newfoundland dog than a feline pet. There are at least half-a-

dozen houses at which Tom is on equal terms of intimacy, which he enters and leaves just as the fancy takes him, and where he knows he will always find a welcome at five o'clock tea, or at eight o'clock dinner. In his way, he is invaluable. If Madame is out of sorts, indisposed for continuous reading of the last new novel from Mudie's, and anxious to be freshened up with a little lively talk about men, manners, women, and things in general, she hails with feelings of infinite relief the announcement of Mr. Clincher's name; for Tom is sure to have come primed with all the latest gossip, and heavily charged with every description of the newest scandal. It is a mystery where he picks it all up. Is the man ubiquitous? or does he employ a mysterious army of agents dispersed in different quarters of the metropolis, anywhere between Camden Town and Clapham, Whitechapel or Mayfair, whose business it is to make themselves acquainted with everything that is doing, and at close of day report the same to the ears of their all-absorbing master? Men like Tom Clincher are to the drawing-room precisely what the morsel of bread is to the champagne when natural effervescence has departed. Just as the application of the latter causes the delicately golden fluid to surge up once again from the lowest depths of the glass with infinite beads and bubbles, so the entrance of the former into a drawing-room where the social atmosphere is flat, stale, and unprofitable, restores or imparts life, vigour, and sparkle to the assemblage.

But the *ami de maison* class is an extremely numerous one, and susceptible of almost any amount of subdivision. *Amis de maisons*—why, we have them of all conceivable kinds—from the social butterflies who flit elegantly in and out of gilded *salons*, settle for a moment on a couch, flutter away again to an ottoman, and finally vanish, amid a sunshine of smiles, and a musical ripple of decorous laughter, to the well-meaning, sensible, and strong-minded friends, who usually assume a feminine shape, and who have no other object in saying what they have to say than the good of those whom they are pleased to address. As for social butterflies, they are as warm—if the term can be applied in this context—whose name is legion. They may be of either sex—may be young or old. Systematic trifling alone constitutes their essence. Elegant creatures these, whose business it is to do nothing, and to do it in a graceful and refined manner. Yet they may be dangerous too: they can sting sometimes, these *papillons*. They may be detrimentals; and when they have made their exit, you find that the path of their departure is marked by a trail of destruction—by a *débris* of what the world calls broken hearts, and what not else. We leave the description of this species of creature to the pen of Mr. Lawrence. He it is, and he only, who has made us adequately feel what a mysterious power is possessed by these youths, whose complexion is pink and white, delicate even to effeminacy, but whose muscles are iron, and who can thrash a bargee with as consummate ease as they

can captivate the affections of the too credulous maiden. Instances of these combined powers are, we dare say, still to be met with in society; but in a general way we are not guilty of depreciation when we venture to remark that "cherubs," who make it the business of their lives to whisper sweet nothings and perilous somethings into feminine ears, toying the while with daintily-trimmed moustache, golden in hue and silken in glossiness, are seldom admirable Crichtons, when removed from those regions dedicated to the flutter of muslins and rustle of silks—a land resplendent with mirrors and odorous with perfumes.

Let us introduce ourselves to one or two instances of the *amie de maison*—the latter number will perhaps be sufficient. Miss Fynesyghte may be accepted as a representative of her order. Miss Fynesyghte is a friend of the family. If you are but recently married, she will take exceedingly good care to give you the benefit of all her experience. She will obtrude her presence upon your wife at all conceivable hours of the day. She has always something to suggest and something to say. A most invaluable person no doubt; but excessive excellence may become a bore. Miss Fynesyghte is so very superior, that either you or your wife—perhaps both of you—soon begin to be more and more sensible of your own inferiority in her presence; and when once that feeling sets in, admiration will rapidly give way to prejudice. Besides, Miss Fynesyghte is so remarkably saga-

cious, that she is always seeing things which you do not see. It is a question whether she attaches herself most to the gentleman or the lady. The chances are that it is to the latter. In this event poor Mrs. Breezy is a marked victim. Miss Fynesyghte pours into her ears a whole series of tales and hints, innuendoes and suggestions, the general result of which is to make Mrs. Breezy believe that her husband is a monster. Miss Fynesyghte of course deprecates the notion that she has said anything of the sort: "Oh, no, my dear, it is not my way to make mischief. Still, you know I think that if you were—I know that you are far too wise though—but still, if you were disposed to be jealous, Mr. Breezy's repeated absences from home—putting them, I mean, in connection with what you told me yourself about Mrs. Hammond just now—might seem to demand some explanation."

We all know how this kind of thing may be expected to end; and the consequence is that when Mr. Breezy comes home to dinner he finds pretty little Mrs. B. in tears.

"My darling, what's the matter?" for Frank Breezy is in reality devoted to his wife.

"Oh, Frank," sobs out the little woman, "that dreadful Miss Fynesyghte has told me such things about you. Are they true?"

And so the whole story comes out. The result is that when Frank, having satisfied his wife entirely, goes into his dressing-room, he has cursed Miss Fynesyghte mentally by all his gods. "D——n the woman," remarks

that gentleman as he adjusts his white tie; "I always hated her like the devil, but I won't stand this."

So Mr. Breezy writes Miss Fynesyghte a rasping note, and forbids her the house. She attempts a reconciliation, but on this point both Mr. and Mrs. Breezy are quite firm, and Miss Fynesyghte is accordingly relegated from the Breezy's *ménage* to any other establishment which she can find.

Miss Minniehaha Price may be selected as a second illustration. This young lady is in every way the exact antithesis of Miss Fynesyghte—in age, appearance, manners, intentions, and functions. She is, perhaps, an old school friend of Madame's, and so, with an ease and naturalness of manner that are positively charming, at once claims intimacy with you. If your wife is dull, Miss Minniehaha Price is at once in request; if you are going to dine at your club, your wife and Miss Price will have tea in the drawing-room together. The consequence is that when you are discussing your claret that same evening at the Pandemonium with an old friend, sensible of the value and tact of Miss Minniehaha Price, you suggest to him that he has now arrived at that period of life at which matrimony is a desirable step; you are obliging enough to add that if he will dine with you on such and such a day you will introduce him to just the the girl in the world for him; and thus the Miss Minniehaha Prices of society meet with their reward, even as the Miss Fynesyghtes do with theirs.

But it is out of our power to do justice to the almost

countless types of the different fair occupants of the drawing-room, languishing and piquant, young, old, and middle aged. We must be content to conclude this chapter with some little allusion to a class of ladies, distinct from other classes, ubiquitous in their existence, unmistakable in their main features, and, if we mistake not, of comparatively recent development—those gentle creatures whose social accomplishments and matrimonial tactics are summed up in the one word, "gushing." Sentimental gushing babble is always to be met with where the flutter of feminine robes is heard and the heaving of feminine bosoms is seen, as, thanks to the present *régime* of fashionable costume, it invariably may be seen. Gushing, however, of the highest order is an art which does not come in the same way that, according to Rasselas, poetry was supposed by the Arabians to come, as an immediate gift of the gods to men; it can only be acquired after a somewhat laborious course of practice. The young lady who has suddenly emerged into the full glories of her first season will not be able to gush forth in one steady, continuous flow of dulcet nothings. If she attempts to reveal the secrets of her inner life, she will only do so by a series of uneasy spurts and clumsy jerks. She will let it be seen that she is endeavouring to gush, and this spoils the whole affair. *Ars celare artem*; and the mistress of the art will gush so naturally that one would suppose it to be her normal strain of talk. As a rule it is only at that precise epoch when the fair maid,

who has been known in the saloons of beauty for many a weary season, and who has waited pining for the suitor that will not come, enters upon a stage which is called by some *passée*, by others rich with the charms of fully developed womanhood, that the adept in gushing is seen. Only then are the fountains of the heart completely opened; only then does the well of sentiment begin to overflow. It is an unfortunate thing that Mrs. Glasse's celebrated recipe for the dressing of hares applies also to matrimony, and that one can neither cook a hare nor a husband without catching the animal first. The question, therefore, that suggests itself to the lovely damsel is, how is the husband to be secured. Hitherto all means have failed. She has danced, she has ridden, she has frequented archery *fêtes* and flower-shows, and every other conceivable hunting-ground in which the unwary male is usually supposed to run wild. But all to no purpose. The time has clearly come to change her tactics. She commences by establishing herself as the acknowledged *confidante* of the young men of her acquaintance. Let them tell her all their disappointments, all their sorrows. In her they will meet with sympathy. She has known grief and regret. She has been a creature of warm and impulsive affection thrown away upon the world. But how is it she finds herself talking thus? Ought she to tell them so much; shall she continue? Gallantry permits of but one answer, and the gushing proper at once begins. Of course, in a number of instances it may, from

a matrimonial point of view, fail utterly. Young men of the present day are strangely shy, and cruelly cynical, and the youth who has been sufficient hypocrite to feign the deepest interest in the narrative of the dear impulsive creature will not improbably be cold-blooded enough to repeat all he has been told over the evening cigar in the smoking-room. But then there are always striplings of an impressible temperament, and more generous mould, who love to meet with a gushing partner of this description. They like to tell their secrets to some such sister confessor—they like to be playfully lectured for their vices; and, when once this stage is arrived at, gushing may occasionally be resorted to by a proficient in the art with considerable effect.

But gushing is not limited to the wiles of maidenhood. Gushing wives are creatures that almost every one must have met, and that probably no one would not be sincerely thankful if he never met again. Ladies of this description have a fondness for rushing into the most surprising revelations of their domestic experiences on the least provocation, or sometimes on no provocation at all. At a moment's notice they will tell you everything to do with themselves, their husbands, and their children; the number of their servants, and the wages they pay them. The matter is aggravated by the fact that all these details are probably entered into in the actual presence of their lords and masters, and a very uncomfortable time one would naturally suppose their lords and masters must

have. There can be nothing so annoying to a moderately sensible man as to hear the wife of his bosom lifting off the veil from the mysteries of domestic life, and disclosing a whole host of particulars that can interest no persons but herself and her housemaids. Nor is it much more agreeable for the stranger into whose bosom all these confidences are poured. He will see the uneasiness of the unhappy husband, will hear his significant cough, and will witness his abortive attempts to turn the conversation into other channels. The tongue of the lady is irrepressible. It is difficult to decide whether the gushing of wives who do or who do not implicitly admire their husbands is the more insufferable. The choice lies between the mild excitement of hearth-side scandal and the nauseating influences of unchecked conjugal eulogy. Few things can be more annoying to most persons, unless they have a most insatiable appetite for gossip, than to be condemned to a prolonged *tête-à-tête* with a wife who does not consider herself to be appreciated; to be told how sensitive is her disposition, how utterly her husband misunderstands her, how she looks back to the days before she had tied herself down for life, and how wretched her existence altogether is. She endeavours, she will tell you, to do her duty; but it is up-hill work. She knows not now what sympathy is; she yearns for it, but her husband is not sympathetic. It was against the express wish of her friends that she married her husband; and she is discovering her folly in not obeying them. Of

course, she must struggle on, but it is dreary work. All this may be easily intelligible. You may be quite willing to believe that a model wife is wasting her sweetness upon the desert air, but you really do not care about being told so; and it is, at times, almost difficult to feel as if you are not overhearing a conversation which ought not to be for you, or reading some letter that is meant for other hands.

There are, however, other species of gushers, who gush with a distinct object in view, kindred to that which was first mentioned, of whom it may be well to know something. The gushing of the diplomatic mother is, indeed, the most subtle of any. On a sudden it occurs to the judicious matron that a certain youthful swain is demonstrative in his attentions to her daughter. What is to be done? Is he to be encouraged or not? Nothing is known of him by the family. He may have been picked up in some ball-room, or be the stray waif of some watering-place. By some means or other the young man must be drawn out. He must be made to confess who and what he is; what are his prospects; what is, or what is to be, his profession; who are his friends; and whence he comes. There can be nothing surer than that if the questions were placed to the victim point blank, he would at once fight shy; but if he is only gently and delicately handled, all the required information may be easily elicited. Strephon is neither hardened nor unimpressible. He wants but to receive the initiative, and he will say anything that is desired. And so mamma commences to

gush, and Strephon at once gushes too. The requisite facts are discovered, and the aspirant to the daughter's hand is either petted or else receives the coldest of cold shoulders forthwith. Nor is this the only use to which the practised female schemer will turn the art of gushing. A matrimonial pigeon of a highly desirable description is descried at a distance. With the keen eye of a practised sportswoman the mother takes him in at once. She loses no time in thrusting the daughter who is to be disposed of upon him. The pigeon, perhaps, is shy, and ill at ease. He must feel that he is a friend of the family—that he is, in fact, one by adoption of the little circle of relatives who cluster for dinner round the domestic table. He must grow accustomed to his cage. And here again family gushing may incidentally be immensely utilized. Only let him be well enough and skilfully enough plied with family secrets, and matters must speedily be brought to a head. Received as he is into the most sacred bosom of home confidences, what can he do? A loving heart is offered him; he is young, susceptible, and perhaps not over wise. He shall find, he is told, in the mother whom the law is to give him, a mother as tender and as loving as she who was given to him by nature. All is so delightfully free and open: they are a charming family. Every one tells him everything; and after the manner in which he has been received, retreat is impossible. With which fragment of social analysis we may take our leave of the typical heroines of the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISCELLANEOUS DRAWING-ROOMS.

Irrepressibility of "Shop"— Conditions necessary for general conversation — "City" Drawing-rooms: why they have lost their distinguishing characteristics — Mrs. Sprawler's Drawing-room — Drawing-rooms not in London — Country-town Drawing-rooms — Drawing-rooms in Watering Places: Brighton — Their usages, character, and *personnel* — Mrs. Vidua—Academical Drawing-rooms —At the Rev. Dr. Duffin's — Undergraduate torture — Mrs. Greystoke.

HOPELESSLY inexhaustible are the multitudinous varieties of the drawing-room. In the foregoing chapters we have endeavoured to give something like an adequate portraiture of the more prominent and representative specimens of the modern English salon. If in the remarks which we yet have to make we are able to place before the reader the main social features of such few as may seem to merit a supplementary notice, we shall, we think, be entitled to lay claim to be considered moderately exhaustive and reasonably conscientious chroniclers.

In a rough way we may say that there are as many drawing-rooms as there are professions. Notwithstanding the very praiseworthy and natural objection which professional men have to carry the thoughts, talk, and asso-

cations of their public avocations and every-day callings into their private life, and their extremely intelligible desire to cast off all thoughts of the office just as they doff their office-coat, it is impossible that they can altogether succeed in so doing. Just as we have it on the authority of Sir Walter Scott that the hound in his nightly slumbers re-enacts the part which he has played in the daily chase, so in some way or other the occupations of business hours and the themes of the business day will well-up to the surface in leisure moments. Bring together some three or four men whose employment is similar, collect them round the same dinner-table, and you will find that insensibly and irresistibly their conversation will glide into the channel of their regular every-day work. If they are barristers, their talk will be legal; if they are "something in the city," you will have the irrepressible Stock Exchange to the fore. If medicine is their *métier*, they will discuss the forthcoming meeting of the faculty at Leeds, Edinburgh, or wherever else it may be. If they are soldiers of the pen, their gossip will inevitably assume a literary hue. "Shop," in fact, much as we deprecate its introduction, is unavoidable. It is the natural thing for men to talk on what is nearest to their thoughts, and on what comes readiest to their lips. What holds true of the dining-room "across the walnuts and the wine," when the ladies have mounted upstairs, holds good also in great measure of the drawing-room as well. If you are a barrister, and take your wife to dine with

you at your friend Serjeant Bailey's, to meet that celebrated Chancery lawyer who has just put on his silk gown, Longhead and Mrs. Longhead, with Mr. Snap, who has a capital Quarter Sessions practice, or Quirk, who is so great an authority on all points of ecclesiastical litigation, you may be quite certain that when you desert Mr. Serjeant Bailey's claret for tea and the drawing-room, the respective ladies of the gentlemen in question will indulge in a conversational vein redolent of legal gossip, and haunted by the recurring presence of parchments, precedents, and tape. Had the company been more miscellaneous this remark would not have held true. If Serjeant Bailey had invited a mixed company possessed of various and mutually different social interests, this distinctly professional talk would have been tabooed, and the themes discussed would perforce have been more general in their nature. As a rule, a professional drawing-room ceases to be professional in the sense in which we have used the phrase, directly you have the presence of the representatives, or the deputy representatives of more than one class of professional interests. The social comments which we have already had occasion to make *à propos* of those who follow the calling of literature holds equally true of other callings as well; and the great tendency of the day, so far as social intercourse is concerned, is to merge the special element in the general. What we may call the spirit of conversational limitation or sectarianism is ostracized from among us—that is, given only the pre-

sence of variety in the occupants of the drawing-room. It is impossible completely to banish it when all the guests present are drawn from entirely the same social stratum. Such a contingency as this seldom indeed occurs; when it does occur we have the natural and inevitable result in the shape of the professional drawing-room which we have above described, and a less agreeable or profitable species of salon it is impossible to imagine.

Thackeray in his immortal volume devotes a chapter to Great City Snobs; it might be expected that we should also devote a chapter to City drawing-rooms. For the reasons that we have stated it would be almost impossible to do so with any degree of advantage. The much greater freedom with which various classes and orders associate with each other, as compared with the principles that regulated their mutual intercourse even ten years since, renders it a question whether the City drawing-room does in reality exist at the present day. The magnates of Lombard Street and the Crœsi of the Exchange have their salons, it is true; but there is no marked difference between the social phenomena observable in the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy of wealth and those in the drawing-rooms of the aristocracy of birth, or the great territorial bigwigs of the realm. There has, in fact, been going on for some time past a great socia evelling-up movement. The hard and fast line which once separated class from class and interest from interest has in great measure vanished. Our House of Lords is recruited

every year from the number of those who, to their infinite honour be it said, have sprung from the ranks, and who have found commercial success a means of social elevation in every way: the east-end and the west-end—we use the words as metaphorically significant of two distinct traditional ideas—have been brought near to each other. The Earl of Broadacre figures as director in City companies. Mr. and Mrs. Hardcash hold their own in Belgravian drawing-rooms. Whether the change in question be the result of what is called the mammon worship of the day, or the increased liberality of the times, we know not. It is enough for us that it has occurred. It may have been fashionable some generations since to sneer at the self-made men of commerce; the sneer is not indulged in now. If Lord Broadacre sends his son to Eton, so does Mr. Hardcash, and the heir of the Manchester manufacturer and of the proudest peer in the realm sit together in their form, and contend with each other in friendly rivalry upon the playing fields. Hence it is that there is no necessity for us to attempt to describe City drawing-rooms as a class: for, as a rule, the drawing-rooms of City men do not differ from the drawing-rooms of the descendants of those who came over with William the Norman.

To say that uniformly in every case this social assimilation is complete, would be to venture upon a proposition indefensibly sweeping and broad. It would be, doubtless, easy enough for us to comment upon certain social eccen-

tricities observable in some of the drawing-rooms of Cottonopolis. Very likely Mrs. Chump, wife of Mr. Chump, head partner in the great Manchester cotton-spinning firm of Chump, Chornder, and Co., may scarcely have the manners, address, or breeding of a duchess; possibly Chump himself, seeing that he was originally only a pit-boy, may still have something to learn in the art of demeanour and breeding; not improbably the Miss Chumps are signally deficient in "that repose which marks the caste of Vere de Vere;" and it is, we suppose, undeniable that the Chump drawing-room, as indeed the whole of the Chump establishment, is conspicuously an ostentatious display of wealth which critics would call undeniably vulgar. But then, just as it takes one or two generations to eliminate what is known as "the tar-brush," from the blood, and the negro pure and simple is the inevitable progenitor and precedent of the quadroon and octoroon, so, too, some little time might be allowed for the completion of the levelling-up process, to say nothing of the fact that Cottonopolis, as a school of manners, possesses disadvantages and drawbacks from which London is free. Only let us wait a little, and the Chumps of a generation or so hence will be decent specimens enough of social civilization.

But there are other drawing-rooms than those of the Chump order, which furnish a fairer and more fertile topic of criticism. Enough have we said elsewhere on the subject of the *salons* of a Brummagem aristocracy

in the chapter which we devoted to the Fitz Jugge *ménage*. We need not recur to the theme here. The drawing-rooms of spurious gentility are by no means only to be found, or even principally to be found, among the classes from which the Chumps and Fitz Jugges of society are drawn. If you wish to come across an utterly detestable instance of the spirit of sham aristocracy, commend us to the drawing-room that belongs to such ladies as Mrs. Sprawler, *née* Languish. The Languishes, Mrs. Sprawler will tell you any time you choose to hear it, are an ancient and honourable family, and the acknowledged founder of the race was one Hugh de Languesce, a name which, according to Mrs. Sprawler, frequently occurs in the writings of the old Norman chroniclers. If you want to see this lady in the full glory of her martyrdom, you should visit her in the afternoon. She will be delighted to see you; and you may depend upon it, that before you have been engaged in conversation with her for ten minutes, she will discover that your mother, or your uncle, or your second cousin twice removed, was on terms of the greatest intimacy with one of the noble race of Languishes; not improbably, if it appears to her that the stock from which you came is sufficiently select to be honoured with such an association, she will find out that there has been some intermarriage between your own family and hers. "So you see," Mrs. Sprawler will gently murmur, "there is really a kind of cousinship existing between us."

On the strength of this wildly imaginary relationship, Mrs. Sprawler will at once take you into her confidence on a whole host of family matters. Memories of her child-hours will come back to her in troops.

"This is not the kind of life to which I have been accustomed, Mr. Blank. I little thought once that I should have married a man moving in the society in which Mr. Sprawler moves. You will have heard, I daresay, of the kind of persons that we used to have at Fiddleton Grange? Ah, then, you may imagine how great the change is now to me. All our friends, except the dear Dieaways"—Sir Charles Dieaway is the snobbish and pompous representative of a second-rate and bran-new baronetage, and Lady Dieaway strikes you as being one of the most insolently vulgar women with whom you were ever brought in contact—"belong so purely to the mercantile order. They are all in the City, just as Mr. Sprawler himself is. Ah!"—and here Mrs. Sprawler seeks relief for her feelings in a delicate sigh,—"it is a great trial for me. I find I have absolutely nothing in common with them. You cannot think how great a luxury it is to me to have this conversation with one who, like yourself, will understand the bitter ordeal of my daily existence.

In this tone of vulgar imbecility does Mrs. Sprawler ramble on to whomever she determines to make a victim of. And the woman's mind is visible enough in every corner and angle of the apartment. All things about you are suggestive of an atmosphere of washed-out gen-

tility. You see it in the furniture, and the decorations of the drawing-room, just as much as you do in Mrs. Sprawler's offensively inane talk. Sprawler very likely is to be blamed as much as he is to be pitied for the drawing-room displays which his wife is always ready to make on the slightest provocation, or without any provocation at all, to every stranger who is introduced. Sprawler was ambitious of contracting a marriage with a member of what he termed, in the commercial parlance amid which he had been educated, "a first-class family;" and when old Languish gave him his daughter, his manner said, as plainly as possible, "You may take her, Sprawler, because you have money and I have none; but don't forget that you are an upstart cad, and we are descended from that stock whose progenitors helped to conquer this kingdom for William the Norman, and whose names are written in Domesday Book. Take her then, Sprawler, since you are willing to pay the sum necessary to be paid."

We have had something to say on clubs not in London. What are the drawing-rooms not in London like? or have they any, or sufficiently many distinctive features of their own to make them worthy of chronicling here as a separate class? What the country drawing-room is in its pleasantest development,—the drawing-room of the country-house,—that, we have before now, and some way back, described. It is not to these that we allude here. The drawing-rooms of country-towns must provide us with the topics of our immediate investigation. After

all, these are little more than miniature reproductions of London drawing-rooms—miniature we say, with no allusion to the diminished size of the apartment itself, but in view rather of the diminished nature of its doings and the decreased prestige of its whole atmosphere. Gossip and scandal do indeed find a conspicuous place in our metropolitan *salons*, but then they are on a certain scale of magnitude: the gossip and the scandal of the drawing-room not in London strike you as being infinitesimally small and infinitely malignant: petty and peevish personalities,—these contribute their sum; tittle-tattle of the most provincial order, discussions as to the daily doings of the Joneses or the dinner-party which the Smiths gave last night; conjectures as to the antecedents of those persons who have just taken the house in the Square, or debates as to the means which the new comers on the promenade have at their disposal for the support of the social display which they manage to keep up. The difference between the ordinary gossip of London and of country drawing-rooms is, indeed, strongly suggestive of the difference underlying life in the metropolis and life in the provinces. You may in the former be talked about, and indeed are pretty certain so to be, if you acquire a social reputation for anything whatever, but at the same time each deed of your daily life will not be canvassed with that particular minuteness which it cannot escape should you be subjected to the criticism of the country drawing-room. Your out-goings and your in-comings,

your up-risings and your lying-down will not be canvassed and scrutinized in the microscopic manner in which they will inevitably be, if the venue is shifted from the great town of the world to the little towns of the country.

Drawing-rooms there are whose geographical situation is purely and entirely provincial, which scarcely merit the epithet country, seeing that the aggregate of their occupants are drawn from London itself. Such, for instance, are the drawing-rooms of Brighton, in which—the whole town itself being nothing more than a London-super-Mare —the drawing-rooms are naturally of a London type as well. There are certain small points of difference in the reproduction. The variety is naturally very much diminished. The persons whom you meet in one you meet in the other; the circles of society are very much narrower, and the sets infinitely fewer: consequently boredom is a far more likely contingency. Then during the season the Brighton drawing-room is seen a great deal more under the kettledrum aspect than the London salon. In fact, during the months of November and December kettledrums at Brighton are very much *de rigueur;* and it is a form of dissipation and entertainment for which existence at the place seems peculiarly adapted. When it begins to get dark soon after three, and one is probably without many of those appliances wherewith to beguile the time that must pass before dinner is announced, and to which one is probably accustomed in London, the question naturally arises, What is to be done? The

kettledrum, a dismal species of enjoyment, as in our private opinion this is, comes in as furnishing a satisfactory solution. Some distinct types of character are, however, after all, to be met in the Brighton drawing-rooms, and especially on such occasions as these. There are certain persons—we might almost say we are now using the word in Mr. Mill's favourite sense—who seem to devote the whole of their existence to the visitation of watering-places, who are the standing dishes and permanent institutions of the sea-side. Coming under this category, you have in the first place a very large contingent of widows, whose ages vary, and whose grief for their departed lord and master seeks that species of consolation which a substitute and successor would supply. For instance, for the last five years pretty little Mrs. Vidua has been engaged in making the grand tour of all the various fashionable maritime towns of England. She tried Boulogne once, but it did not answer. Mrs. Vidua is clever enough in her way, but occasionally, as in this instance, she gets outdone. She was foolish enough to flirt in a rather unguarded manner with a Russian noble, of dubious title and ambiguous antecedents. The gentleman in question turned out an inveterate knave and an accomplished swindler, with one or two wives already living, to say nothing of wives dead. This little affair did Mrs. Vidua's réputation no good, and certainly did not serve to increase her value in the matrimonial market. The result is she has fought shy of Continental watering places. "My

dear," very wisely observes Mrs. Vidua to her married friend, Lucy Wigram, "you never know whom you may meet there, and can never be certain that the man who sits next you at the *table d'hôte* may not be a bigamist, a trigamist, or some other such dreadful thing."

The English watering-places, however, Mrs. Vidua does very regularly indeed. Either it is Scarborough in the summer, with Brighton in the winter; or else it is Ryde and Brighton, or some other such attractive town is selected in lieu of the first. Brighton is always a fixed article in Mrs. Vidua's programme, and as regularly as November comes round this piquant little lady is to be seen at Brighton pier surrounded by cavaliers, and ogled by squires *ad infinitum*. On Ryde pier, in the bright summer mornings, it is perhaps that Mrs. Vidua is seen really at her best. The elegant *abandon* of morning costume suits her style, and the saucy littly sailor hat which surmounts her high coils of light-brown hair—no, madam, indeed it is not golden, and we are too honest to flatter you—sets off Mrs. Vidua to perfection. Still at Brighton the little widow is taking enough. Somehow or other, however, she does not seem to make any headway: as we have said, it is now the fifth year since she first recommenced her matrimonial strategics, and her design is still as far from consummation as ever. What can be the cause? Is it that the price which the little woman sets upon her heart and hand is too heavy? or that there is any truth in the sentiment which those who know Mrs.

Vidua best are in the habit of oracularly uttering when the prospect of that lady's bidding farewell to the condition of widowhood is hinted at? Mr. Charles Flitterly, for instance says:—"You know the little Vidua is all very well to flirt with, and very jolly too in her way; but as for marrying, by Jove, the man who did that, would find he had his work cut out for him." As for Mrs. Vidua *viget æternumque vigebit*—that may indeed be her motto, but her celebrity will be that of the widow—not of the wife. Still will she continue to be seen, and to coquette in the drawing-rooms of Brighton, Ryde, and a host of other such places, as regularly as the sea-side seasons come round; but here her career will end. And alas, Mrs. Vidua sees herself, as she consults the matutinal mirror, ample evidence of the stern truth that if she intends to change her state there is no time to be lost. The warning wrinkles which, the too truthful looking-glass tells her, time is writing upon her brow, the contraction in the region of her countenance immediately beneath the eyes, the fixity of expression which is fast overspreading those features that were once so softly flexile—these, with many others, are the outward and visible signs of the unwelcome truth, that the day is fast coming when no hats, however saucy, no ways, however piquant, no dresses, however prettily devised, will be able to disguise the fact that her attractions belong to a period which is past. A melancholy reflection this to Mrs. Vidua. This too perhaps it is which suffuses her face, naturally lively and bright, with an

occasional look of intense sadness—quickly shaken off it is true—but very dismal while it lasts: and it may be questioned whether there is any sadness more profound than that which overshadows the features of the professed flirt and systematic coquette when the thought forces itself upon her—and force itself, as we have said, at times, it will and must—that her better days are gone, and that the cards must soon be thrown up. If you want to study this particular phase of human nature under specially favourable opportunities, repair to the drawing-rooms of Brighton and other fashionable marine resorts of a similar description.

But the inexhaustible varieties of character to be met with in the drawing-rooms of the fashionable watering-place—who shall enumerate them? As for those maids, elderly by the way, and matrons of dubious incomes, and almost dubious reputations; those gentlemen of the Capt. Betterday's order, who, as a final resort in their quest after a social prestige and social connection, have taken, like the stag at bay, to the waters; the diplomatic mammas, with whole trains of marriageable daughters; the garrulous ladies of a certain age, who know every one and every thing, and who spend the whole of their existence in doing the round of all the coast towns of England; the *roués* and the almost bankrupts, who have come hither to recruit their pockets and their health; the numerous contingent of invalids, from the gouty Paterfamilias who expresses his disgust with the world in

general in speeches heavily shotted with vigorous anathemas, down to the languishing lady who reclines on the drawing-room sofa, or is wheeled about in the Bath chair when the weather admits of this unwonted exercise; the semi-detached wives, and the wholly non-attached husbands—the former the centre of a throng of admiring worshippers, while the lord and master, who comes down perhaps from Friday to Tuesday, is working out the problem of existence in chambers or counting-house; the latter anxious that their reputation as Benedicts should be forgotten in their feats as celibates, despatching their wives with the children to Trouville, Dinon, or perhaps leaving them simply behind in the house in Onslow Square or Porchester Terrace—all in their way types of character specially peculiar to watering places; as for these, we repeat the interrogation with which we started—*quis digne scripserit?*

Drawing-rooms not in London! As these volumes do not profess to fulfil the functions of a guide-book to all the various circles of provincial society, we may be allowed to abandon this portion of our theme with very few more words. There is, however, one description of non-metropolitan salon that presents the attraction in great measure of virgin soil—the drawing-room academical. The drawing-rooms of Oxford and Cambridge are to be met with nowhere else. Search beyond the banks of the Isis and the Cam, and you have them not. The picture of Oxford life from the undergraduate point of view has been pre-

sented to us often enough. Latterly, even, we have become acquainted, through the medium of certain ingenious writers on academical subjects with the *vie intime* of the Common Rome, and the more salient features of "don" existence—the don, that is, who passes his term-days within the walls of his college, and who believes that it is impossible to be a loyal *socius* of his foundation if he takes to himself a *socia* of his joys and troubles. There is, however, a wide field of don life observable at the Universities, other than this. Of late years the phenomenon of the married don has become increasingly common. In spite of the reproach brought against Oxford that it does not offer a sufficiency of inducements to men who are masters of the subjects in which they teach to settle down in the place, and there, pursuing the accustomed labour of their instruction, to spend the residue of their days in the bosom of wife and family, it is a fact that the thing is done ten times now for every once which it was noticeable a few years ago. Naturally the character of academical drawing-rooms varies according to the character of their owners and occupants; and if a University Fellow possesses strong domestic instincts, there is no reason why, on his marriage, the mere fact that he has attained a certain measure of academical distinction should invest his *ménage* with any exceptional or particularly repellent attributes. As a rule, however, the academical drawing-room, *par excellence*, is repellent. Its atmosphere is chilling, its social tone constrained, its manners

unbending, its occupants rigidly dignified, its laws inhospitably exclusive, and its *tout ensemble* as unattractive as can well be imagined. The air is redolent with "shop,"—shop of the most technical and *borné* description. The conversation that you hear is of the most limited kind, and sternly centres round a few stock academical subjects. If you accept an invitation to dine with the Rev. Dr. Duffin, Principal of Boniface, you will probably, indeed, have a repast admirably cooked, and wines altogether unexceptionable in character. But you will find yourself in a chillingly repressive conversational atmosphere. Perhaps you have taken down Miss Agatha Slowcoach, daughter of Mr. Slowcoach, senior tutor in the college. It is the highest object of this young lady's ambition to wed an Oxford first-class man, and, if possible, one who has crowned this distinction with the achievement of a fellowship. It is currently believed that she cherishes a burning attachment for Mr. Particle, your *vis-à-vis*, a young man with watery eyes, a weak mouth, lank sandy hair, whose body is put together on principles which inspire you with an uncomfortable misgiving that it may at any moment fall asunder; who is regarded as one of the most accurate scholars of the day, and who has just been appointed, much to Miss A. Slowcoach's secret delight, one of the examiners in the final classical schools in which he, of course, took a first-class. What are you to talk about to the young lady? You start with the Academy. She cuts you short with saying she seldom goes to London, and asks

you what you think of the new chapel at Balliol. Music? Yes, Miss Slowcoach went last week to a charming concert given by the amateurs of Exeter College. You are led on to discuss opera. Miss Slowcoach harks back to the academical hobby, and thinks you a very poor creature indeed unless you display the liveliest interest in the number of first-classes gained by the undergraduates of Boniface, and the great good fortune which the college has just experienced in gaining Mr. Mildmuff as a fellow. Or you may, as a desperate expedient, be sanguine enough to hope that a theme which, within the range of your tolerably extensive experience, has never yet failed to kindle an ample allowance of feminine interest, will be successful with your present companion, moot the delicate topic of the last drawing-room scandal in the metropolis. Alas! even this proves a failure. Lady B——'s elopement with the Marquis of A—— may be very well, but what is it in Miss S.'s estimation compared with the matrimonial rumours which have lately been set going in academical circles, affecting two of the junior Fellows of St. Ambrose? At last you begin to fancy that Miss Slowcoach wishes to devote her attention to Mr. Particle across the table. Consequently you abandon all efforts to amuse her, or to elicit from her a responsive vein of talk. Either you relapse into a moody silence, or you seize the alternative of discussing with Mr. Donnishe, your next-door neighbour, the probable results of the unattached student scheme at Oxford.

The society which you witnessed at the Duffin dining-table down-stairs, will be reinforced in the Duffin drawing-room up-stairs by a large contingent of the undergraduate class. By an act of immense condescension, Mrs. Duffin has invited a number of these wretched youths to tea. Now, oil and vinegar do not amalgamate; and between the graduates and undergraduates of Oxford there is a social gulph, too wide to be bridged over, fixed. As for the feminine encouragement which the young men in question receive on the present occasion, it is *nil*. Miss Slowcoach makes it a practice to snub an undergraduate whenever an eligible opportunity offers. Mrs. Duffin half apologizes to you for their appearance, and as for Particle, and the other rising Fellows who are in the apartment, why they shun them as if they were afflicted with leprosy. The unhappy lads are thus entirely left to their own resources. They huddle round a table in an obscure quarter of the room; nervously fidget with their hands, turn over the pages of photographic albums, and then start with alarm at the audacity of which they have been guilty, stutter forth an occasional remark to each other, and then shudder aghast at the sound of their own voice. A little music ensues. Miss Slowcoach endeavours to flirt with Mr. Particle; the intervals of pianistic and vocal melody are filled with an intermittent running fire of academical scandal. Still the undergraduate element remains in the same obscure corner of the room; and so the evening, and with it a fact—for which you are probably

grateful, your experience of a University drawing-room concludes. The despised undergraduate will betake himself off to his own cozy rooms, and there between the puffs of his nocturnal pipe will, as he lounges, clad in the boating jacket of repose, full length upon the couch, whose appearance is none the better for age and wear, express his opinion to his comrades:

"What an infernal nuisance it is that the Principal will ask you to his house; and if you refuse the invitation, think you rude; or if you accept it, not treat you like an ordinary human being. By Jove, Smith, you should have seen old Slowcoach's daughter trying to get up a flirtation with Particle! Greatest fun in the world, I assure you."

If the academical salon which we have here selected, is a fair specimen of by far the most numerous class, it does not follow that this is the only kind of treatment which the undergraduate receives from his college superiors and their wives. For instance, Mrs. Greystoke receives the young men in a very different way; but then Mrs. Greystoke is quite an exceptional specimen of the the wife of a steady-going college tutor; for Mrs. G. is a flighty, vivacious little woman, who gets horribly bored with the unsufferable air of stereotyped decorum that prevails in the apartments dedicated to the ladies of the class, whom she irreverently describes as "those musty old dons," and who really enjoys, wrong as she knows it to be, the society of the pariah undergraduate. Consequently, when she asks these young gentlemen to her

drawing-room, some of whom she pretty frequently does, she is prepared to encourage their conversational powers to any reasonable extent. Nay, the words "sad flirt" are even whispered in circles of the Duffin description, *à propos* of Mrs. Greystoke's demeanour towards these young gentlemen. And it is certain that Mrs. Greystoke's appearance is suggestive rather of the piquant miss than the sedate academical matron. But scandal is not our business here, and we will relinquish the subject.

CHAPTER XVII.

DRAWING-ROOM ETHICS AND DRAWING-ROOM EPISODES.

Are our manners and morals better or worse than those of our fathers? — Genesis of the phrase, "Girl of the Period" — The period of ethical excellence like that of the Greek Myths — Fastness and Flirtation: difference between the two — Miss Dashville — At a fashionable bootmaker's at the West End — "Such things are" — Goodwood Lawn in 1869 — A Photographer's shop-window: Phryne amongst the Divines — Feminine slanginess: its significance, and entire conformity with the spirit of the day — Flirts and Flirts — The fun of flirtation — Married flirtations — Episode of Mrs. Guest, *née* Laura Mirand, and Mr. Arthur Berkeley — Lady Lakely and the Marquis of Loughrigg — Is there a cause? — *Rationale* of such episodes explained, and their true and only remedy stated.

THE manners and morals of the drawing-room—and by the drawing-room we mean its occupants—are themes well-nigh worn threadbare. But their social importance remains unaltered for all that; and the social sketcher who failed to delineate certain of their more prominent features would be guilty of a grievous dereliction of duty. How, then, do we stand at the present day as regards these matters in comparison with our fathers and our forefathers? Are we better, or are we worse? Has there been a movement upwards or downwards? Or has there been no movement at all? and are we pretty much as

they were, not superior indeed, but yet not inferior; and is it true that from one century's end to another, from the termination of one decade to that of another, human nature remains in its essential points pretty much what it always was, developing possibly, but not changing?

It is well to look these matters boldly in the face. The outcry which has been raised by our ethical censors compels us, out of justice to ourselves, and in a spirit of self-defence, if of nothing else, to do so. Great and grievous are the charges which have been brought against the social morality of the present day. Repeated are the impeachments which have been made against the drawing-rooms of the period; emphatic the denunciations of the lax code of morals prevalent with those fair creatures that should be centres of sweetness, purity, and light. A habit of light and flippant flirtation is by no means the most serious sin laid at their door. It may be one of the external developments of the vicious tendencies of the day; but the evil itself lies far deeper, and is far deadlier in its nature. The spirit which finds its expression in thoughtless badinage, tinged with a pseudo-sentimental hue, among our *jeunesse dorée* and our high-born and delicately-bred maidens, is radically evil, and must sooner or later lead—and here we are reminded that instances in fact are by no means wanting—to disastrously deplorable results. These, we repeat, are points which demand investigation; charges into the validity and significance of which it is absolutely our duty to inquire;

impeachments, for the purpose of sifting which fully, we must extend the field of our drawing-room observation, and enlarge our studies of the talk and of the doings which go on within their precincts, or which are so intimately associated with the notion of their existence as to form part and parcel of their very life.

Some time since it was the misfortune of a well-known weekly periodical to coin a certain phrase, which was immediately elevated to such a pitch of popular promotion that it became, almost at once, a most detestable species of vulgar cant. There was nothing particularly remarkable in the phrase in question; it was free from exceptional or felicitous novelty; it was wholly devoid of epigram, and was by no means remarkable for wit. But the composition which it introduced to the public was smart and striking, and it seemed that these merits in the article imparted a specially racy flavour to the title. No sooner had the journal, to which we allude, published its paper, "The Girl of the Period," than the expression was caught up on every side, was made to serve as the text for social homilies of every conceivable kind, and for twaddling essays of every gradation of worthlessness. It furnished dealers in all sorts of feminine costume with a new catchword for their advertisements, and the purveyors of comic verse with a nomenclature for their compositions, which was accepted as an earnest of unfailing success. We had "girl of the period" corsets, jupons, crinolines, bonnets, and Heaven knows what else. We had "girl of the

period" waltzes, quadrilles, and melodies, with or without words. In a short time the application of the phrase became extended, and "the young man of the period" was introduced to our acquaintance—a hideously vulgar excrescence upon society, full of the airs of the casino, and redolent of the fumes of "free-and-easies" and music-halls. A little later, and under the title of the "Girl of the Period Miscellany," the public saw issued monthly a magazine full of poor writing and vulgar prints, dedicated to the purpose of showing us, from every point of view, what it said was the life which our English girls of various orders lived, of explaining to us the atmosphere of ideas or rather of no ideas, in which they moved, and of initiating us into the marvellous vocabulary of slang in which the experience of the projectors of the "miscellany" in question disposed them to think our drawing-rooms abounded. It may reasonably be believed that when the journal responsible for the origination of the name witnessed the vulgarity of purpose to which its ingenuity of phrase had been prostituted, it regretted the happy inspiration which had placed it in its mouth, and that it saw in the mire of degradation into which it had been dragged a more than adequate Nemesis for the brilliant hit that the title, under which the article, already alluded to, was published, had achieved. To fly through the mouths of men may be a legitimate ambition; but after all one would fancy that even here the line must be drawn somewhere if the continued acceptability of the honour is to be ensured.

Heaven forbid that we should of set purpose catch up the phrase, or inflict upon our readers here a disquisition which should justify their exclaiming in tones of loathing and disgust, "*Crambe repetita* with a vengeance, the Girl of the Period again." A deprecation of any such intentions as these will not, however, preclude us from pursuing the inquiry which it is the object of this chapter to make. As for the observations, complimentary or uncomplimentary, eulogistic or dyslogistic, which have been made by any of the multitudinous woman's critics of the day, we shall neither attempt systematically to corroborate nor to refute them. For ourselves, we are strongly of opinion that the standard of feminine excellence is pretty much the same in all ages. In the long run, human nature, we suppose, is about the same now, has about as many weak and as many strong points as it always had. The points of weakness and of strength may not indeed be always identical in kind, but, if a general calculation were entered into, it would probably be found that there was no material discrepancy in their numbers. Our drawing-rooms may be free in the present day from the salient social features and social grossnesses of a hundred years since, just as their occupants have ceased to talk in the vein which found favour with the ladies who graced the court of Elizabeth or Anne; but the aggregate of feminine virtues and vices does not, we are disposed to think, vary much. We have our paragons now, and we shall always have them; just as we have, and shall con-

tinue to have, their ethical antitheses. Feminine merit is in many ways like feminine costume. *Laudatores temporis acti* there are never found wanting to persist in averring that the beauties of the latter as existing in a bygone age were indisputably in excess of those to be met with in this matter now: from modes of dress to manners and morals is but a step. The real truth, we opine, is that the period of immaculate ethical excellence on which these retrospective critics love to dwell resembles the period of which the Greek myths are supposed to be symbolical—a past that was never a present at all.

Fastness and flirtation—these we are informed are the prominent characteristics of the young ladies of the new school. If Miss Dashville displays a certain demonstrative independence of spirit; if she shows herself as little troubled as possible by the social curse of diffidence; if she is up, in the slang parlance of the day, "for most things, from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter;" always ready to join in a dinner at Richmond, or to valse till her partner scarcely knows whether he is standing on his head or his heels; fond, when in the country, of riding to hounds, and capable of holding her own with the best flyers in the field; if, in a word, she revels in all the fulness of life, and in the joyous sense of luxurious existence incidental to a perfectly healthy English young lady ætat. 19 to 22, Miss Dashville is at once set down as fast. As for a flirt, you could scarcely call Miss Dashville that; for she studies none of those arts which are supposed to cap-

tivate men's hearts; and when she does wander out into the conservatory between the intervals of the dance, with Jack Highstep, there are no tender passages of any kind in the conversation of the pair. You might overhear every word the young lady utters, and you would not be able to detect the slightest undercurrent of anything approaching to sentiment. She likes Mr. Highstep because he rides well to hounds, because he is full of animal spirits, has, as she forcibly puts it, "no humbug about him, and is always capital fun." Young ladies of the Miss Dashville type rejoice in "chums" and "allies," they are never "sweet" on anybody, nor do they expect anybody to be "sweet" on them. As for eloquent looks of languor, gentle pressures of the hand, well-timed sighs, significant pauses, half whispers, amid the aromatic fragrance of the orange trees, where seats are ranged expressly for the purpose of flirtation, these are exotic strategics which they either wholly neglect or of which they know nothing. This is one type of feminine and drawing-room fastness. We do not say that there are not others, or that it is impossible to conceive of a fastness which does not gain its name from more delicate and dangerous attributes. But Miss Dashville is a young lady of a description to be met with in any drawing-room you enter, and in any country house which you may visit. Hers is a fastness arising from a robust good nature, innocent if not meritorious. It is the fastness into which the sentimental or quasi-sentimental element enters that is really dangerous.

Let us introduce the reader to a scene that we sketch from life, in which the fastness displayed is of a different order from that characteristic of Miss Dashville. We are in the midst of a tolerably numerous assemblage of young and youngish ladies and gentlemen; all of them well, many highly, born, the possessors of names whose worldly prestige is considerable, and whom, a natural desire to preserve the strongest measure of impersonality we can, prevents us from minutely and individually describing. The place? Well, it is not the drawing-room; yet it is a room for all that—a room situated in the establishment of a fashionable boot-maker, in one of the most frequented thoroughfares of the West End of London. Strange, but true. Do these "bright occidental stars" come hither to purchase the latest things in *bottines*, the freshest novelties in shoes? Nominally, yes; really, no. The genuine object of each member of the fashionably-dressed throng, in whose midst we are, is social intercourse, conducted upon principles of propriety doubtless, but still on principles less rigidly conventional than those supposed to be observed in the drawing-rooms of the day. It is impossible, argue these young ladies and young gentlemen, to enjoy that perfect freedom from constraint which human nature, in its rebound from the strongest formalities of fashion, requires, while diplomatic mammas are looking on, and well-practised duennas exercise a vigilant look-out that their fair charges may not go too far with young Charles

Lackland, who has not a penny to bless himself with, or with Freddy Youngerbrother, who, it is well known, will not have enough on which to keep his wife's brougham. Besides, there is an irresistible attraction in the consciousness that meetings under such conditions as these are tabooed. Stolen kisses are sweetest; and what can be more exquisite than to know that one is stretching the binding-chain of decorum to the very utmost extent of its tether? And then the opportunities afforded in this way for increasing the list of one's acquaintance are charmingly numerous. Miss Maude Flipley agrees with Miss Helen Goahead that Reginald Blackball is incomparably nice; but then Reginald Blackball is rather punctually ostracised from the region of all well-bred drawing-rooms. Here, however, our friend Reginald is free to go and come as he chooses, and is firmly established as a first favourite. As for this gentleman, in common with the remainder of the sterner portion of the company, of course he delights in the whole arrangement; for is not the whole arrangement a questionable kind of man-worship, and is it not immensely gratifying to male selfishness and pride to know that one possesses influence enough to induce these daughters of the land to act in a manner which would cause society to shake its head? As we have said, there are many of the heroines here to-day whose names are without a stain upon them; but even to these the terms upon which the association is conducted furnish an agreeable change from the conditions on which

the society of the drawing-room is carried on. What is the general nature of the conversation? Well, the conversation is essentially particular in its tone. You may see Mr. George Rattler whispering things into Miss Reefer's ear which cause that young lady to blush and laugh by turns. Yonder again is a fair demoiselle asking questions of a heavily-moustachioed squire who stands at her side, in a low tone, *à propos* of matters which are supposed to be the peculiar themes of the club smoking-room or the exclusive topics of bachelors' chambers. We do not absolutely say that any tangible harm comes of these mysterious reunions: all that we do say is, that if the world in general remarks that these young ladies have taken a page from the leaf of the book of Phryne and Aspasia, the remark may not appear utterly unjustifiable; and that if any fair young creature sees fit to enter, stealthily though it is, the apartment in question, she lays herself open to the imputation of fastness in a manner quite different to that in which Miss Dashville does. If we are asked by an inquisitive public for our justification in mentioning such facts, we simply reply, "Such things are."

Let it be understood that we have been speaking now of the fair representatives of the very highest world of fashion—of those who are the legal tenants of the most aristocratic drawing-rooms in society. It is to this social order that these little eccentricities, this dangerous playing with terribly-edged tools, are in great measure confined. We believe we are stating nothing but the simple

truth when we say that at this moment the true depositaries of the highest forms of English social ethics are to be found in the drawing-rooms of what are known as the middle classes. Extremes meet; and there is a far stronger tendency, in a general way, on the part of those who are great ladies to assimilate their modes of action to the actions of those who are not great ladies, than on the part of that portion of our population whose path of life is situated in the direction of the mean. To touch pitch without experiencing defilement is a proverbial impossibility. The daughters of our aristocracy are brought every day into contact with pitch in a manner as perilous as till lately it was unprecedented. We wonder whether any of our readers were on the lawn at Goodwood on Wednesday, July 29, in the present year of grace 1869. They must have noticed a sight of most malodorous significance. The heroine of the enclosure—who was she? Who was it that the wives and daughters of England's most illustrious nobles pressed so eagerly to see? One of their own order? Nay, a woman whose claim to distinction was the measure of her infamy—the most notorious *protégée*, at the moment, of Venus Misthoté. Yet there she was: thither with her patrons she had made her way; and England's best bred and fairest ladies looked on with feelings of which it would be difficult to say whether they were those of virtuous indignation or admiring jealousy. But extreme though this instance was, it was merely the natural development of what has

long been going on among us. Walk down Rotten Row any day during the season, and you will see in the ride spotless maidens elbowed by notorious Hetæræ. Listen to the conversation of these same spotless maidens, and you will hear them ask their cavaliers who these Anonymæ of the Park are; inquire what are their habits, where they live, how they live, who are their most recent patrons, and what are their charms that they are so irresistible. We all know what the result of excessive familiarity with an evil may, under certain circumstances, be. From the disgust of a first impression to the determined rivalry of a second reflection there is but one, and that sometimes a fearfully short, step; and the spirit of envy excited in the bosom of the English maiden, as she notes in the shop window of the photographer the disgraceful prominence accorded, amid the celebrities of the day, distinguished senators, illustrious ladies, and grave divines, to the portrait of a well-known Dalilah, may conceivably be the precursor of active emulation. If under these circumstances the influence of St. John's Wood makes itself felt upon the *habituées* of the drawing-rooms of the West End, we can scarcely be surprised. It would be simply impossible that the entire consciousness of the scenes and society in which our young men pass a portion of their time should not contribute towards some degradation—transient though it may be—in the standard of drawing-room ethics. Only let it be clearly understood that we do not intend these remarks of ours to bear any-

thing like a general application. "The Girl of the Period"—we are constrained to use the expression, after all—is the type of a limited, and not an unlimited class.

There is a special phase of drawing-room fastness disagreeably current in the present day, which for want of a better word we may denominate the vice of slanginess. In a general way feminine slanginess may be defined as the excessive and undue attempt on the part of a woman to assimilate her manner and bearing to those of a man. It is the tribute which the drawing-room pays to the club—a species of homage accorded by the *salon* or the boudoir to the smoking-room. The trait is unlovely enough, but it is precisely in keeping with what is the predominant spirit of the day. The studied habit of flippancy, the reckless use of phrases which ill suit feminine lips, the air of general negligence and disrespect which go towards making up the connotation of the substantive which we have employed,—all these are the natural products of an age whose pervading genius is the genius of irreverence. As we read the records of the social traits of a past generation, and contemplate the spectacle of modesty and veneration which their manners displayed, we seem in the midst of an atmosphere of unreality which we cannot understand. The whole thing is so utterly different from what we are accustomed to in our own time. We have banished that respect for superiors which existed once among us. Parents no longer stand upon their parental dignity. We have outgrown all

those admonitions of our childhood which taught us that honour was due to hoary hairs and reverence to the wrinkled brow. There is nothing so sacred in idea, or so time-honoured in its association, that it is free from the treatment of levity which it is sure to receive in the present day. We burlesque the tragic drama of the Greeks, and we mutilate the plays of Shakespeare that we may make of them extravaganzas. In every way as the world grows older it grows more and more irreverential, and in the train of irreverence follow fastness of tone, flippancy of manner, and slanginess of talk. Just as a poet, however capable of great and glorious works he may be, can no more rise above the level of the age, than humanity in general can afford to defy the law of gravitation, so, we suppose, is it impossible for the drawing-room to escape the prevalent influences of the period: and of these influences, irreverence is the soul—irreverence of which, for our present purposes, slanginess may be regarded as one of the expressions and developments.

Flirtation, we are informed on every side by subtle sociologists, is in a greater degree than it ever was one of the predominant drawing-room characteristics of the day. Firstly, let us observe that it is about as easy for a woman, young or middle-aged, to acquire the reputation of a flirt, as it is for a dog to win the distinction of a bad name. A sinister interpretation will put a construction of flightiness and flirtation upon the slightest acts and the most really insignificant speeches. By flirtation, however,

pure and proper, more is, or ought to be, meant than the efforts of two people to render themselves mutually agreeable. We need scarcely here insist upon what is the line of demarcation between that which is flirtation, not in name merely, but in spirit and intention also, and that which is not. Equally unnecessary is it for us to attempt to classify all the many kinds of flirtation which are possible or conceivable. Flirts are of many orders—from the flirt who lives mainly for the purpose that the name conveys, pursuing the occupation calmly, coolly, and deliberately, down to the flirt to whom flirtation simply constitutes an agreeable amusement for the passing hour —a *dernier ressort* for a wet day in a country house, and an additional relish to a slow dinner-party, or a pleasant accompaniment to a dull picnic. 'Tis the pride which it is natural for fallen humanity to take in the conscious exercise of power that lies at the bottom, and is the true soul of all flirtation. With women it is the keen desire of mutual rivalry and proved superiority to the remainder of their sex, which causes them to plunge in the giddy mazes of flirtation. As for men, it is the result of the atmosphere in which they perpetually live and move and have their being—an atmosphere of elaborate trifling, which breeds the habit of refusing to look at anything *au sérieux*, to see anything else in the exchange of hearts than the conveyance of incomes and rentals, the necessity of curtailing one's own bachelor expenses, and of renouncing a mail phaeton and chambers for a small house

in South Belgravia or Westbournia, a lady's-maid, and a brougham.

Now, if flirtation is merely regarded as a game, and assuming that it is possible to continue so to regard it for any length of time, there may be no material objection to the pastime. But then it is essentially necessary that the purely playful character of the occupation should be recognized equally by both those who take part in it, and should never be lost out of sight, just as it is necessary that the players should be at all points equally matched. Directly the players fail in this respect, as soon as ever they forget, or one of them forgets, then the whole thing ceases; the fun of the game is over. There are flirts and flirts; there are flirtations and flirtations. When Captain Jilter, an old practised hand at the business—for a business of what ought to be a game Captain Jilter is always ready to make—was first introduced to pretty little Agnes Couslippe, a young *ingénue* just launched upon her first London season at Lady Tyghtefytte's ball, and then there made up his mind to negotiate a flirtation with the little girl in question, it was plain at once to see that there existed between the two a monstrous disparity of conditions. The consequence was, that when in August she went into the country to stay at her father's house, Couslippe Manor, the poor child retired, as the Captain chose to put it, "distinctly winged." "Can't make out what has come to Agnes," said Mrs. Couslippe to her lord and master; but then mamma knew nothing of the

inanities, wicked as well as foolish, which Captain Jilter used to whisper into her darling's ear, in the pauses of the dance, when they had strayed on to the balcony overlooking the square, or of the passages, which had occurred between them when the Countess de Lyons gave her great garden-party at her Twickenham villa. Flirtations, we repeat, of this description are extremely poor sport. The skill is all on one side. Captain Jilter's dexterity may be considerable; but then the measure of his dexterity is also the measure of his cowardice.

When Edwin and Angelina, coequals in experience and skill—for a girl of eighteen or twenty is nowadays an ample match in these respects for a young man of twenty-five—dance several times together, talk a good deal, laugh a good deal, meet much subsequently, and then separate—he to Norway, and she to the Tyrol—the thing is very different. The world may have called it a flirtation, but it is one of the lightest kind, and we don't believe that the hearts of either were a bit less whole than they were two or three months since. And here let us observe that in the majority of cases it is not the season in London which is the fruitful parent of deep and dangerous *liaisons*, but the subsequent vacation in the country. Then it is when the young of both sexes, who have hitherto known each other only on the common ground of fashionable town drawing-rooms, amid a multitude of various distractions coming with equal power to both, find themselves habitually in each other's company,

in the midst of exactly those scenes which are the most treacherous incitements to ill-advised speeches, occasional hand pressure, and significant glances, that danger may be apprehended. Dissipation is the safest antidote to the real fruits of flirtation.

So much for one or two classes of flirtations. But we are very far from having exhausted the list, and we have as yet said nothing as to that increasingly numerous order in which one at least of the parties engaged is a victim to the obligations of matrimony. If of flirtations of the purely unmarried order serious evil seldom comes, it scarcely ever fails to come of those which in contra-distinction we call married. As we have said, these are decidedly on the increase. That there is a cause for this increase we are quite certain, and what that cause is we shall soon have occasion plainly and distinctly to state.

When pretty Laura Mirand married Mr. Guest, head-partner in the well-known firm of Guest, Host, and Co., in the City, no person supposed that the match was a match of love. Laura often used to sit far into the night, with her long hair floating down her shoulders, and her dainty little feet just peeping from beneath her dressing-gown, and resting on the bar of the fender, debating with herself whether she could make up her mind to the arrangement, and talking to her cousin, Blanche Hazeltine. "My dear," said Laura, "I think I hate that man: he tried actually to kiss me to-night; but I told him that that was really what I could not and would not stand. Oh,

Arthur," half soliloquizingly would Miss Mirand exclaim, "why haven't you got a little money even?" Now Mr. Arthur Berkeley was an old favourite of Miss Laura Mirand's, and two seasons ago the world had fancied that something more than friendship would come of their acquaintance. But as Laura was in the habit of remarking, "It was not to be." Then, just as Mr. Mirand was being heavily pressed for money, appeared Mr. Guest on the scene, a suitor for his daughter's hand. "Why, the prospect," argued Mr. Mirand with his daughter, "is one that half the girls in London would jump at." As we have seen, to jump at it was what Laura was by no means disposed to do. She accepted it, however, and in a very short time from the date of the paternal speech she duly became Mrs. Guest.

For a time matters went on well enough. Mr. Guest did all that money could do; and Laura, with her really splendid house, her opera-box, her horses and carriages, experienced the satisfaction of her position, and took a pride therein. As for Arthur—"poor Arthur," as she used regretfully to speak of him—he was out of town, endeavouring to forget himself and her wherever good shooting was to be secured, and good wines to be drunk. Time passed on. Either matters were not so promising in the City, or Mr. Guest found his wife a slightly more expensive luxury than he had anticipated, or some other similar untoward event had occurred, for Mr. Guest began to exhibit frequent deviations from that unruffled front of

serene good humour which had originally been his distinguishing trait. In fact he became, in the language in which Laura used to speak of him to her intimate friend above-mentioned, Blanche Hazeltine, who still retained her maiden name, "a perfect brute." "My dear," she said, "he comes back from his office in a frame of temper that is absolutely diabolical, abuses the cook and abuses everything. Last night I had positively to leave the room."

Two days after this confidential communication, as Mrs. Guest was driving in the Park, whom should she see but Arthur Berkeley—"and looking so dreadfully ill," as she informed Miss Hazeltine, subsequently. "Come and see me, Arthur. We were friends once, why should we not be so again?" murmured Mrs. Guest, after a few words had passed. Mrs. Guest's carriage drove on, and the next day Arthur, who, by-the-by, had vowed when he returned to London that he would have nothing more to do with Laura, duly presented himself at the door of the Guests' mansion in Eaton Square. Mrs. Guest in? Yes, she was—and quite alone. This was the first time which Mr. Arthur Berkeley called in Eaton Square, but it was very far from being the last time. Indeed, the intimacy between Mrs. Guest and him was not much less—the world was disposed to think that it was much greater—than when the lady in question was plain Laura Mirand. Men at the club began to look an unutterable amount of knowingness when Mr. Berkeley's name was mentioned,

or when it was remarked that Mrs. Guest had been seen with Mr. Berkeley at the opera. "Long-suffering beast that Guest must be," was the verdict of the smoking-room at the Pandemonium; "wonder how long he'll stand it? So devilish cool, too—all carried on under his very nose."

Mr. Guest was decidedly pachydermous so far as all sensitiveness was concerned. He was never at home except at dinner, and even that meal he had taken a good deal to having latterly at the club. Consequently, Mr. Berkeley was seldom thrown in his way, and it was mainly by the scraps of gossip which he picked up that he knew of the state of things at present existing between his wife and her adorer of the old days gone by. At first, however, he did not think it worth while to mention the matter to Laura; for his mind was perpetually full of the harassing anxiety of the counting-house, and he had but small leisure for domestic affairs. One day, however, he happened to be dining at home—quite a *tête-à-tête* affair with Mrs. Guest. Matters had been unusually bad that day in the City, and the consequence was that the temper in which the lord and master of the mansion in Eaton Square returned was anything but of the sweetest. The dinner, Mr. Guest observed, was villanously cooked, and why hadn't Laura asked some one in? She knew there was nothing that he disliked more than these cursedly solitary meals. Of course, Mrs. Guest was very sorry. She did not know whom Mr. Guest would have liked to have seen. Upon this reply the gentleman in

question put down the wine-glass, which he was in the act of lifting to his mouth, with such violence on the table that it at once fractured the delicate stem in two. A sudden fit of passion had come over him in less than a moment. His face was scarlet, and he stammered forth his words with a scarcely articulate stutter.

"By God! madam, but you know whom to ask here to please yourself. I'll tell you plainly what it is; I have heard of your goings on, and that cursed scoundrel Mr. Arthur Berkeley—Mr. Guest used a stronger word, and one which implied a stronger reflection upon the wife of his bosom—don't enter this house again."

"Mr. Berkeley," was Mrs. Guest's irritatingly cool reply, "will not probably care to come where he is not wanted; and since, sir, you seem unable to preserve your temper, and wholly impotent to control your tongue, let me suggest that it would be the best plan for me to retire from the room, and leave you to your wine;" and Mrs. Guest rose and prepared to go.

"No, madam, you don't," was the observation of the husband, as he stationed himself full in the door-way; and as Mrs. Guest hated scenes, she reseated herself in her place.

Two days afterwards there was a fresh scandal in town, and the two prominent figures of it were Mrs. Guest and Mr. Arthur Berkeley.

Now, however much averse we may be to admit the truth, it is impossible to deny that scandals of this descrip-

tion have become more common among us lately than usual, and scandals they are which are wholly and entirely the results of flirtations of the second class that we have mentioned. When a couple of young unmarried people choose to enter upon the dangerous ground it may be said that nothing exceptionally tragical can be the *dénouement* of the affair. The wings may be just singed, but that will probably be all; a few flesh wounds may be received, but these can be readily cured. We all know the reply of Dr. Johnson to the ingenuous question of Boswell—whether there was any reason that a love affair with a countess should be preferable to an intrigue with a milkmaid, "Sir, in the case of the countess the excitement is superior." Now our drawing-rooms at the present day afford us ample illustrations of instances in which the exotic male butterflies, who are ever on the chase after pleasure, consider "the excitement" to be so much "superior" in the case of married flirtations as to be the only one worth having at all. Of late years the *ami de maison* has become a much more common phenomenon than he once was. Semi-detached wives have multiplied in number, and the field for married flirtations has consequently become very much enlarged.

The genesis of these is tolerably easy to trace, and may be readily and briefly described. When Clara Lakely married Sir Henry Foris, every one knew, or subsequently said they knew, the kind of future that was in store for her. Sir Henry was generally considered to be one of the

most selfish men in London, devoted to Newmarket, devoted to the clubs, and irretrievably wed to every kind of unhallowed bachelor enjoyment. When they returned from Italy, Sir Henry was in truth uncommonly glad. "Clara was all very well in her way, but hang it, you know," said the baronet, "you'd get bored with Venus if you were married to her." And in truth the honeymoon had bored Sir Henry horribly. He missed the occupation of running down to his stables at Newmarket, and of playing his nightly whist at the Arlington. He missed also, we are sorry to say, certain miscellaneous little suppers which had, till the time of his marriage, been with him a pretty regular source of delight. In fact, Sir Henry was seriously beginning to entertain the conviction that matrimony was, for a man at least, the grand and irrecoverable error of existence. Now Lady Foris had before her marriage lived a life of extreme pleasure to herself, had been in the habit of receiving much admiration, homage, and flattery. When therefore on their return to London for the season Lady Foris began to notice what she esteemed the neglect of herself by her lord and master, saw how Sir Henry preferred the whist at the Portland to the box at the opera, and heard reports to the effect that he had by no means wholly renounced the anomalous doings of his bachelor days, she naturally felt aggrieved. Her pride was up, and her pride was considerable. She determined to show the baronet that she was quite capable of taking care of herself, and of enjoying herself in her own

way. Nor, it must be confessed, did Sir Henry display any decided objection to this arrangement. He liked his own way, and he continued to go it; and he was perfectly satisfied, so long as this licence was allowed to him, that his wife should be allowed to go hers.

And this Lady Foris exhibited great promptitude in doing. She went out everywhere, enjoyed herself in every possible way, was the centre of a throng of worshippers in her opera-box, and gave parties in her house in Marlborough Square at which the master of the establishment never even put in an appearance. In fact, Lady Foris lost no time in playing at all points, with perfection and facility, the *rôle* of the semi-detached wife. Lady Foris was young, very good looking, extremely agreeable and clever, just suited to the taste of the most ambitious aspirant to the full honours of a married flirtation. At this period of affairs the Marquis of Loughrigg, who had been absent from England for some two or three years, returned from his continental travels, full of continental ideas. The semi-detached wife system exactly suited the Marquis of Loughrigg's preconceived notions on the subject. He was duly introduced to Lady Foris, and he at once determined that Lady Foris should be his quarry. At balls the Marquis danced with conpicuous frequency with her ladyship, in her box at the opera he was always to be seen, he rode with her in the Park, drove her to Richmond, and now and again, while Sir Henry was passing his time over his guinea whist at the Arlington, Lord

Loughrigg would escort Lady Foris home "when the play was o'er," and would occasionally be prevailed upon to sup with Lady Foris in the elegant seclusion of her boudoir. Under these circumstances, it is not unnatural if the world talked, and if the episode of the Marquis and the baronet's wife furnished an excellent theme to the gossip-mongers of the season of '69. What came of it all? Well, it may be that the game is not even yet played out, for the Marquis met with a severe accident just as the month of August was opening, and the season was closing, which compelled his retirement from the world of London.

Perhaps we may seem to have selected here instances of an extreme character. Possibly: but the *dénouement* which we have hinted at as the occasional result of the semi-detached wife and married-flirtation system is the natural and logical tendency of all such *liaisons*. The ante-matrimonial flirtation may be now and then somewhat tragical in its consequences; but the tragedy of these is as nothing when compared with the tragedy of those which are post-matrimonial. As we have said above, in the case of these danger is to be apprehended from the very first. The wife is treading upon ground that may and probably will prove fatally perilous, once she suffers herself to reveal the secrets of her married existence—call it her married prison-house if you will—to men, whether they belong to the Arthur Berkeley or the Marquis of Loughrigg type. Directly the young

married woman discovers herself saying things to confidants such as these, in a tone pitched so low that no one else shall overhear; directly she is aware that words are being whispered in her ear which could not be said aloud; directly she finds the stroll into the moonlit-garden, with all the vein of prattle which moonlight inspires, has an increased value; she will be well-advised if she does not refuse to be warned in time.

After the contemplation of instances such as these—and let the reader be assured that they have about them nothing whatever of exaggeration—it must be admitted that flirtations of a certain kind are as perilous a species of recreation as polite society could well enjoy. Having stated the fact of the evil, let us ask what is its course, or whether there is any one clearly defined tangible cause to which it may at once be referred? In our own opinion, as we have already hinted, there most certainly is. Matrimonial scandals would not exist, or would not, at any rate, be of such frequent occurrence, were the view which is taken of matrimony other than that now fashionable. We have imported our fashions from France, and we have also imported our notions as to the sanctity and inviolability of the marriage contract from the same quarter. If marriage is merely regarded as an affair of convenience, we have not the slightest security against the repetition *ad infinitum* of matrimonial scandals. So long as it is *de rigueur* for young ladies to select husbands simply on the ground of their possessions in the present and their

expectations in the future, so long as the priestly-consummated union before the altar is regarded as the final sealing of a commercial contract, who will suppose that any guarantee is afforded us against the violation of what ought to be the spirit of that union? What is likely to be the sequel of marriages, when the preliminary stage of courtship only receives the parental sanction, upon a satisfactory reply being given to the invariable question, "What has he got?" What ground is there for expecting Lesbia Flighty—who, all the world knows, has been sold as much as slave was ever sold, to that drivelling old dotard Warne Parchment, who is venerable enough to be her grandfather—to develop into a model wife? Society may lift up its hands in horror and amazement when it sees and hears of the extremities of fastness and flirtation to which our English maidens will go, and the derelictions of their duties which our English maidens will commit; but had society by its verdict never sanctioned, justified, and praised the existing theories of marriage, it may safely be affirmed that these breaches of fidelity would not be perpetrated, nor these lax excesses of demeanour be popularized. It is because we have grown to look upon the reading of the wedding service as the supplement to the confabulations and agreements of family lawyers, to the signing of deeds and to the conveyance of property, that the fact of its having been pronounced is so lightly esteemed. Far be it from us to palliate or excuse this levity of estimation. We state merely a broad fact, with

as little expression of personal opinion, one way or the other, as is possible; and our statement amounts to this: it is illogical and absurd for society to uplift the whites of its eyes to heaven, and to utter little shrieks of well-bred horror and indignation when it hears of such illustrations of drawing-room ethics, and such descriptions of drawing-room episodes, as we have in this chapter endeavoured passingly to portray,—seeing that these are simply parts of a system, and the natural and inevitable consequences of an order of things which the same society entirely approves, or at least takes no pains to stigmatize. If it is desired to institute any reform at all, we must begin at the beginning; and till we have done this, drawing-room episodes, of however scandalous a nature, will always be on the cards.

THE END.

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